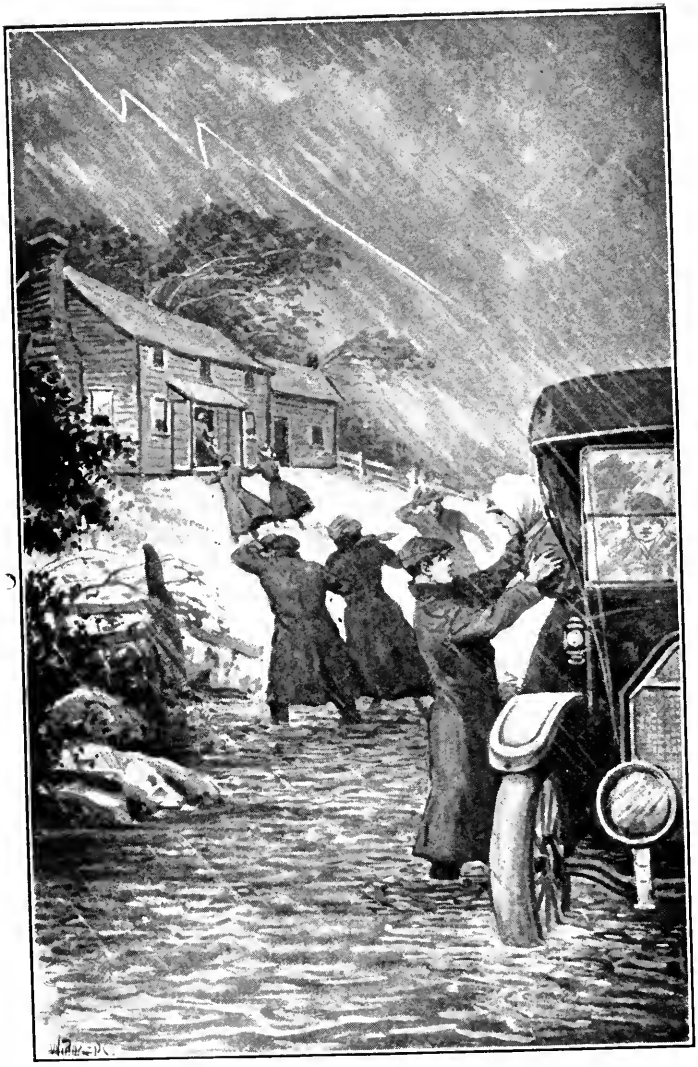
The Rover Boys On a Tour

By ARTHUR M. WINFIELD



THE ARRIVAL AT THE BARLOW FARMHOUSE
Frontispiece—(*Page* 304.)

The Rover Boys on a Tour.

THE ROVER BOYS ON A TOUR

OR

LAST DAYS AT BRILL COLLEGE

BY

ARTHUR M. WINFIELD
(Edward Stratemeyer)

AUTHOR OF THE ROVER BOYS AT SCHOOL, THE ROVER BOYS ON THE OCEAN, THE PUTNAM HALL SERIES, ETC.

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EDWARD STRATEMEYER,

The Rover Boys on a Tour

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INTRODUCTION

My Dear Boys: This book is a complete story in itself, but forms the twentieth volume in a line issued under the general title, "The Rover Boys Series for Young Americans."

As I have mentioned in other volumes, this line was started a number of years ago with the publication of "The Rover Boys at School," "On the Ocean" and "In the Jungle." These stories were so well received that there was an immediate cry for more, and so, year by year, they were followed by the publication of "The Rover Boys Out West," "On the Great Lakes," "In the Mountains," "In Camp," "On Land and Sea," "On the River," "On the Plains," "In Southern Waters," "On the Farm," "On Treasure Isle," "At College," "Down East," "In the Air," "In New York," "In Alaska," and finally, "In Business," where we last left our heroes.

The Rover boys have, of course, gradually been growing older. Dick and Tom are both married and doing what they can to carry on

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their father's business in New York City. Sam, the youngest of the boys, is still at Brill College. The particulars are given of some winter sports around that institution of learning, and then of a great baseball game in which the youngest Rover distinguishes himself. Then Sam graduates from college, and all the boys, with some others, go on a long automobile tour, during which a number of exciting adventures occur. The party is caught in a storm on the mountains, and later on are caught in a great flood. What the Rover boys did under such trying circumstances I leave for the pages which follow to disclose.

Once more I wish to thank all my young friends for the many gratifying things they have said about my books. I trust that the present volume will fulfil all their expectations, and that the reading of the same will do them good.

Affectionately and sincerely yours,

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

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THE ROVER BOYS ON A TOUR

CHAPTER I

THE SNOWBALL FIGHT

"Now then, boys, are you ready?"

"I am!"

"Been ready for the last five minutes!"

"Sure you've got all the snowballs you can carry?"

"I couldn't carry any more if I tried," came from Sam Rover, with a grin. "Just see how I am loaded up," and he glanced down at both hands, which were filled with snowballs, and at the snowballs held under either arm.

"I've got some dandy hard ones," put in Spud Jackson.

"Oh, you can't use soakers, Spud!" cried Stanley Browne, who was the leader of the snowballing contingent. "That's against the rules."

"They are not soakers, Stanley," was the re-

ply. "They are only good and hard, that's all."

"Hi, you fellows! When are you going to start things?" came a cry from behind a snow wall up the slope of a hill. "We can't waste the whole afternoon waiting for you."

"We're coming, don't fear," answered Stanley Browne.

"And when we arrive you won't know what's struck you," announced Sam Rover gaily.

"It's all vell enough to brag, but you'd chust better start dot fight," came in German-American accents from behind the snow wall, and a merry face appeared in sight for an instant and a fist was shaken playfully at those beyond.

"Sound that bugle, Paul!" yelled the leader of the attacking party, and an instant later the mellow notes of a bugle floated out on the crisp, wintry air.

It was the signal for the attack, and with merry shouts the students at the foot of the hill charged upward through the snow toward the wall above.

The occasion was the annual snowball fight at Brill College. Snow fights there were, of course, without number, but each year there was one big contest in which the freshmen and sophomores attempted to hold a snow fort located on the hill back of the institution against the attacks of the juniors and seniors. Accord-

ing to the rules, three charges were allowable, all of which must be made inside of two hours, and if all of these failed to take the fort, then the victory went to the defenders, and they were permitted to crow over their success until the following winter.

A little over an hour and a half had been spent in the sport and two attacks had been made and repulsed, much to the chagrin of Stanley Browne, the senior in charge of the attacking army. Juniors and seniors had fought nobly, but the freshmen and sophomores outnumbered them, and, being strongly intrenched behind the snow wall of the so-called fort, had succeeded in forcing a first, and then a second, retreat.

"Say, fellows, we've got to do it this time, sure!" cried Sam Rover, as, side by side with Stanley, he led the attack. "If we don't oust them they'll never get done talking about it."

"Right you are, Sam!" answered Bob Grimes, who also had hands and arms full of well-made snowballs.

"Remember what I told you," came from Stanley, as he turned slightly to address his followers. "Don't throw any snowballs yet. Do as the soldiers did in Revolutionary days—wait until you can see the whites of their eyes."

"And then make those whites blacks!" burst

out Spud Jackson, gaily. "Come ahead, and no turning back."

Up the snowy hillside sped the crowd of students, while a number of professors and visitors watched the advance from a distance.

"Get ready for 'em! Don't let them come too near!" came in a rallying cry from behind the snow wall. And then, as the attacking party came closer, a volley of white spheres came flying through the air into the faces of the juniors and seniors.

It was a sharp and heavy volley, and for the instant the air seemed to be filled with flying snowballs. Many of them, of course, went wild, but others landed on the heads and bodies of the attacking party, and for the moment the advance was checked.

"Wow!" came from one of the juniors who had been hit in the ear. "Why can't we do some throwing ourselves?"

"That's the talk! Give it to 'em!" came from another student who had had his cap knocked off by a snowball.

"No, no," answered Stanley. "Save your snowballs until we get closer."

"Come on, we'll soon be up there," put in Sam Rover. "Only a hundred feet more, fellows!"

There was a yell of assent, and forward the

charging party went again in the face of another volley of snowballs. By bending low the juniors and seniors protected themselves as much as possible from the onslaught, but many were hit, two so stingingly that they had to retire to the rear.

"Hurrah! We've got 'em on the run!" came from the leader of the fort contingent, who had mounted a tree stump located behind the wall. "Give it to 'em, fellows! Give it too 'em hot!"

"Now, then, boys, all together!" yelled Stanley at the top of his voice, and then the eager juniors and seniors launched their snowballs with all the swiftness and accuracy of aim at their command.

The two previous attacks which had been repulsed had taught the advancing students a lesson, and now in this third attack scarcely a snowball was wasted. Those in the front ran directly up to the wall of the fort, while those farther back spread out, as directed by their leader, to the right and to the left, sending in cross fires at points where the fort was supposed to be weakest.

It was a thrilling and spirited fight, but, although the students were greatly excited, there was little more actual roughness than there would have been at a football or other athletic contest.

"Over the wall, boys! Over the wall!" burst out Sam Rover, and the next instant he was up on the wall of the fort, quickly followed by Stanley, Bob, Spud, and several others.

"Back there, you rebels! Back!" came in a yell from the interior of the fort, and then a wild fusillade of snowballs struck Sam and his chums in various parts of their bodies.

"Jumping hambones!" spluttered Spud, as a snowball took him directly in the chin. "What do you think I'm built of, iron?"

"Get back or you'll get worse!" was the cry from the fort, and then another snowball took Spud in the ear.

In the meantime, Sam Rover had dodged a ball which was coming directly for his face, and now he returned the fire with a hard one that took the sophomore below him in the ear. Then Sam jumped down into the fort, quickly followed by eight or ten others.

"Clear them out! Don't let them stay here!" was the wild cry.

"Everybody around the flagpole!" was the command of the fort leader.

The flagpole was a small one located in the center of the enclosure, and from it fluttered the banners of the freshmen and the sophomore classes. Those making the attack would have

to haul those banners down before they could claim a victory.

Snowballs were now flying in all directions, and it was quite probable that in the excitement many of the students let fly at their friends instead of at the enemy; but it was all good, clean sport, and everybody enjoyed it greatly.

"Now, then, fellows, for a center rush!" came from Stanley, when he and Sam and about twenty others had forced their way to within ten yards of the flagpole.

"Avalanche them, boys! Avalanche them!" came suddenly from one of the sophomores, and then without warning huge chunks of loose snow were sent flying through the air on the heads of those who were battling to get to the flagpole.

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" spluttered Bob, as some of the snow went down inside his collar. "What is this; a snowslide?"

"Oh, you mustn't mind a little thing like that," answered Sam Rover. "Come ahead, everybody! Push!"

There was a wild scramble, with many yells and shouts. Student after student went down in the mêlée, a few to be trampled upon, but fortunately nobody was seriously hurt. There was such a congestion that to make or throw

more snowballs was out of the question, and the most a fighter could do was to snatch up a handful of loose snow and thrust it down the neck of the student opposing him. Sam and Stanley, with four others close by them, had now managed to get within a few feet of the flagpole. Here, however, the freshmen and sophomores had planted themselves in a solid mass, and it looked for the moment as if nothing could budge them.

"Only six minutes more, boys! Only six minutes more!" came from one of the sophomores who had been detailed as a timekeeper. "Save those banners for six minutes and we'll win."

"Hit 'em, fellows, hit 'em!" roared Stanley. "We've got to get those banners this year."

"And we're going to do it," added Sam. He turned to Bob and Spud. "Boost me up, fellows, and I'll walk right over their heads to the pole."

"All right, if you want to take the chance," answered Spud, and in a twinkling Sam was shoved up into the air onto the shoulders of the boy in front of him.

This student let out a cry of alarm, but before he could do anything Sam made a leap forward, landing on the shoulders of two students close to the pole.

"Fire him back! Don't let him reach the pole!" came in a yell from several throats.

"Hold him by the ankles! Don't let him jump!" cried out the leader of the fort defenders.

Several students turned to clutch at the ankles of Sam Rover, but he was too nimble for them, and with another leap he reached the flagpole and clutched it tightly.

"Hurrah! Rover has reached the pole!"

"Get those banners, Sam! There is no time to spare!"

"Hold him!" "Pull him down!" "Maul him!" cried the fort defenders. "Don't let him climb up the pole!"

Several turned to clutch at Sam's legs and feet, but he thrashed out wildly and all but one fell back, fearing injury. The undaunted student caught Sam by a heel and held on very much as might a bulldog.

"Let go there," came from Spud, and the next instant he raised a chunk of snow and shoved it directly into the open mouth of the boy who had the grip. This was too much for the student, and he fell back among his fellows.

"Only two minutes more!" yelled the timekeeper. "Two minutes more!"

"We won't need more than fifteen seconds,"

came triumphantly from Sam, and as he spoke he commenced to climb the pole.

A sophomore followed, clutching again at one of his feet, but now the Rover boy had his hand on the first of the banners, and down it came in a twinkling, and the second quickly followed.

"Here you are, boys; catch them!" Sam cried and, wadding the banners into something of a ball, he hurled them out into the midst of a group of seniors.

"Hurrah! we've got 'em!" was the triumphant cry. "We've got 'em!"

"Time's up!" yelled the timekeeper.

A cheer arose from the juniors and seniors, who quickly held the captured banners aloft. The freshmen and sophomores were, of course, keenly disappointed, and a number of them showed it.

"Let's drive them out of the fort, anyway!" was the sudden cry. "Give it to 'em! Send 'em flying!"

"Wait, wait, this contest is at an end," said a professor who was one of the umpires.

"Never mind, let's have some fun anyway." This cry was taken up on every side, and while some of the seniors retired with the two captured banners, the other students continued the

contest, those who had held the fort doing all they possibly could to overcome and expel their enemies.

As soon as he had thrown the banners Sam slid down the pole, and was now trying his best to make his way out of the crowd of freshmen and sophomores. These students were very bitter against the Rover boy, and several did all they could to trip him up and cover him with snow.

"Say, Sam, that was great!" cried Spud. "Best I ever saw!"

"Out with 'em! Out with 'em!" was the yell. "Don't let 'em stay in the fort even if they did get the banners."

"Come on!" cried Sam quickly. "Now we have the banners let us drive them clean down the other side of the hill."

This suggestion received instant approval and, in spite of all that some of the professors could do to stop it, the fight went on as furiously as ever. Some of the students who had retreated to a safe distance came back with a fresh supply of snowballs, and the air was once more filled with the flying missiles.

"Come on, let us teach them a lesson," cried Bob Grimes. "They should have stopped fighting as soon as the banners were captured. Let

us give the sophomores and freshmen all they want."

This cry was taken up on all sides, and around and around the enclosure which had been designated the fort went the various crowds of students. The blood of the juniors and seniors was now up, and slowly but surely they forced the younger students to retreat. Then came a break and something of a panic, and a few minutes later the fort defenders were retreating down the other side of the hill, which led through some brushwood to a road that ran to Ashton.

"After 'em! After 'em! Don't let 'em get away!" cried Sam, and was one of the first to go down the hill after the retreating students. On the way he paused only long enough to make several snowballs.

Having reached the road which led to the town, the freshmen and sophomores divided, some going behind a barn and others taking to the woods beyond. Not knowing exactly what to do next, Sam and several with him halted to consider the matter.

"There they go!" was the cry a moment later, and a number of students were seen speeding around a corner of the road.

"That's Bissel, the fellow who hit me in the ear," cried Sam. "I'm going after him."

"And, yes, there is Dutz, who filled my mouth with snow," cried Spud. "Come on!"

Sam was already on the run, and, coming to the turn in the road, he let fly several snowballs.

"Here! Here! What do you mean by such actions?" came suddenly from behind some brushwood which lined the roadway and then, as the students advanced still further, they were surprised to find themselves confronted by a tall man wearing a heavy, fur-lined overcoat. He had likewise been wearing a beaver hat, but the tile now lay in the snow.

"Belright Fogg!" exclaimed Sam in dismay. "That lawyer who tried to get the best of us! And I thought he was one of the students!"

"Ha! so it is you," snarled the man in the fur overcoat harshly. "What do you mean, Rover, by attacking me in this fashion?"

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING ABOUT THE ROVER BOYS

"SAY! that isn't one of the students."

"Not much! Why, that's the lawyer who used to do business for the railroad company—the man the Rovers had so much trouble with!"

"Who knocked his hat off?"

"I don't know—Sam Rover, I guess."

Such were some of the remarks made as a number of the juniors and seniors began to congregate around Sam and Mr. Belright Fogg. All of the students could readily see that the lawyer was very much put out over what had occurred.

"I say, Rover, what do you mean by attacking me in this fashion?" repeated Belright Fogg, with a savage look at the youth before him.

"If I knocked your hat off, Mr. Fogg, I am sorry for it," answered Sam, as soon as he could recover from his surprise.

"Knocked my hat off?" roared the lawyer. "You hit me a hard one on the head; that is what you did!"

"Let me see if you are hurt," put in Stanley, stepping forward. "Where did the snowball hit you?"

"You keep your hands off me," returned Belright Fogg. "I've a good mind to have the law on such loafers as you."

"We are not loafers, Mr. Fogg," answered Sam, the color coming quickly to his face. "We were having our annual snowballing contest, and we did not know that any outsider was on this back road. If I hit you and hurt you I am very sorry for it."

"Humph! I think you will be sorry for it if I bring a suit for damages," muttered the lawyer. "I don't know why Dr. Wallington permits such rowdyism."

"This isn't rowdyism, nor are we loafers," put in Stanley, somewhat sharply. "You seem to forget, Mr. Fogg, that this road runs through the property belonging to Brill College, and we have a perfect right to hold our snowballing contest here. If you want to report the matter to Dr. Wall——"

"Bah! I know you students, and I wouldn't expect any sympathy from your teacher. He's too afraid of losing any of his students." Belright Fogg snatched his beaver hat from the hands of Spud, who had picked it up. "I'll set-

tle with you for this later, Rover," he added, and then turned on his heel and hurried down the road.

"I wonder what brought him on this back road on foot?" observed Bob.

"He isn't on foot. He has his horse and cutter beside the barn," answered another student. "There he is now, picking up a robe out of the snow. It must have fallen out of the cutter and he walked back to get it." Which surmise was correct.

"This looks like more trouble for me," said Sam, soberly. "I'm mighty sorry it was Mr. Belright Fogg I hit with that snowball."

"You can wager he'll make out a case against you if he possibly can," remarked Spud. "Lawyers of his calibre always do."

"Well, this settles the snowball fight for us," put in Stanley, as he looked up and down the road. "The freshies and sophs are clear out of sight. Let us go back to the campus and celebrate our victory;" and then, as Belright Fogg drove away in his cutter, the students walked over the hill in the direction of Brill.

To my old readers the youths already mentioned in these pages will need no special introduction. For the benefit of others, however, let me state that Sam Rover was the youngest of

three brothers, Dick being the eldest and fun-loving Tom coming next. They were the sons of one Anderson Rover, a rich widower, and had for years made their home with their Uncle Randolph and their Aunt Martha at a beautiful farm called Valley Brook.

From the farm, and while their father was in Africa, the three Rover boys had been sent by their uncle to school, as related in the first volume of this series, entitled "The Rover Boys at School." This place was called Putnam Hall Military Academy, and there the lads made many friends, and likewise several enemies, and had "the time of their lives," as Tom Rover often expressed it.*

The first term at school was followed by an exciting trip on the ocean, and then another trip into the jungles of Africa, where the boys went looking for their parent. Then came a trip to the West, followed by some grand times on the Great Lakes and in the Mountains. Then the boys returned to Putnam Hall, to go into an encampment with their fellow-cadets.

This term at Putnam Hall was followed by a

* For particulars regarding how Putnam Hall Military Academy was organized, and what fine times the cadets there enjoyed even before the Rover boys came on the scene, read "The Putnam Hall Series," six volumes, starting with "The Putnam Hall Cadets."—PUBLISHERS.

never-to-be-forgotten journey on Land and Sea to a far-away island in the Pacific. Then they returned to this country, sailing down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. After leaving the Father of Waters, they took an outing on the Plains, and then went down into Southern Waters, where they solved the mystery of a deserted steam yacht.

After so many exciting adventures the three brothers had been glad to journey to the home farm for a rest, after which they returned to Putnam Hall, settled down to their studies, and graduated with considerable honor.

"Now for college!" Dick Rover had said. But before setting out for Brill, a fine institution of learning located in the Middle West, the boys had become involved in a search for a fortune left on Treasure Isle.

During their days at Putnam Hall the Rover boys had become well acquainted with Dora Stanhope, who lived near the school with her widowed mother, and also with Nellie and Grace Laning, Dora's two cousins, who resided a short distance farther away. It had not been long before Dick and Dora showed a great liking for each other, and at the same time Tom often paired off with Nellie and Sam was frequently seen in the company of Grace.

A few miles away from Brill College was located Hope Seminary, an institution for girls, and when the Rover boys went to Brill, Dora, Nellie and Grace went to Hope; so that the young folks met almost as often as before.

A term at Brill College was followed by an unexpected trip Down East, where the Rovers brought to terms a rascally ex-schoolteacher, named Josiah Crabtree, who had given them much trouble while at Putnam Hall.

In those days the art of flying was attracting considerable attention and, through the indulgence of their father, the Rover boys became the possessors of a biplane and took several thrilling trips through the air, their experiences in that line coming to an abrupt finish when the flying machine was one day wrecked on the railroad tracks. This had brought on a sharp contest between the Rover boys and the railroad lawyer, Mr. Belright Fogg. The Rovers had claimed all that was coming to them, and the railroad had been made to pay up, much to Belright Fogg's disgust. Later, the lawyer had been discharged by the railroad from its services.

About this time Mr. Anderson Rover, who was not in the best of health, was having much trouble with brokers in New York City who were trying to swindle him out of some property. The

brokers were Pelter, Jackson & Company, and it was not long before the Rover boys discovered that Pelter was in league with Josiah Crabtree. In a struggle poor Tom Rover was hit on the head by a wooden footstool thrown by Pelter and knocked unconscious. This had so affected his mind that he wandered off to Alaska, and Sam and Dick had many adventures trying to locate him. When he was found he was brought home and placed under the care of a specialist, and soon was as well as ever.

Dick Rover was now growing older, and, with his father in such poor health, it was decided that the youth should leave Brill, become married to Dora, and settle down in charge of the office in Wall Street, New York. This plan was carried out, as related in detail in the volume preceding this, entitled "The Rover Boys in Business." At that time, Sam and Tom still remained at Brill, but an urgent message from Dick brought them quickly to the metropolis. A large number of unregistered bonds belonging to the Rovers had mysteriously disappeared, and all the boys went on a hunt to recover the securities. In the end it was learned that their old enemy, Jesse Pelter, was the guilty party, and he was brought to justice. Then it was felt that Dick needed assistance in the office,

and it was decided, much to Tom's satisfaction, that he might get married to Nellie Laning and move to the city.

"That will leave me all alone at Brill," said Sam Rover at that time.

"Well, you shouldn't mind that so much," Tom Rover had replied. "Remember, Grace will still be at Hope," at which words the youngest Rover had blushed deeply.

When the Rovers had gone to Brill College they had been accompanied by their old-time school chum, John Powell, always called "Songbird" on account of his propensity for writing doggerel which he insisted on calling poetry. At the same time there came to Brill from Putnam Hall one William Philander Tubbs, a very dudish student with whom the boys often had great fun.

It did not take the three Rover boys long to make a number of friends at Brill. These included Stanley Browne, a tall, gentlemanly youth; Bob Grimes, who was greatly interested in baseball; Will Jackson, always called Spud, because of his unusual fondness for potatoes; and Max Spangler, a German-American youth, who was still struggling with the language, and who had failed to advance in his studies, so that at the present time he was only in the sophomore

class. They had also made several enemies, but these had for the time being left Brill.

"You'll be the hero of this occasion, Sam," remarked Stanley, as the students tramped in the direction of the college campus.

"Hero of the occasion, I suppose, for hitting Mr. Fogg in the head," returned Sam, with a slight grin.

"Oh, forget that!" burst out Spud. "I don't think he'll do a thing. Remember the affair occurred on the college grounds, just as Stanley said."

"Say! where is Songbird to-day?" asked Paul Orben. "He ought to have been in this fight."

"He wanted to come very much," answered Sam, "but he had a special errand to do for Mr. Sanderson, who is laid up with a broken ankle."

"Was he doing the errand for Mr. Sanderson or for Minnie?" questioned Stanley; and then a short laugh went up, for it was well known among the young collegians that Songbird Powell and the daughter of Mr. Sanderson, a prosperous farmer of that vicinity, were much attached to each other.

As Sam Rover and his friends reached the college campus, a great cheer arose.

"There he is!"

"Here the conquering hero comes!"

"Let us put him up on our shoulders, fellows!" and a rush was made towards the youngest Rover boy.

"Not much! Not to-day!" returned Sam, and slid back behind some of his friends.

"Aw! come on, Sam!" cried one of the students. "You are the hero of the occasion, and you know it."

"Forget it, Snips," answered Sam. "What did the fellows do with those banners?"

"Lentwell has them. He is keeping them for you. I suppose you'll nail them up in your den?"

"Surest thing you know!"

"Maybe the freshies and sophs will want them back," put in another youth in the crowd.

"Not much! They can have them back after I graduate next June," answered Sam. "They have got to understand—— Stop it, fellows, stop it! I don't want to—— Well, if you've got to, I suppose I'll have to submit." And an instant later Sam found himself hoisted up on the shoulders of several stalwart seniors, who tramped around and around the college campus with him while all the other seniors, and also the juniors, cheered wildly and waved their caps.

"Doesn't that make you feel proud, Sam?" asked Spud, during a lull in the proceedings.

"It sure does, Spud," was the quick reply.

"I've only got one regret—that Dick and Tom aren't here to share this victory with us."

"Yes, it's a shame. And just to think of it, after next June, when we graduate, we'll all be scattered here, there, and everywhere, and the good old times at Brill will be a thing of the past."

"Don't mention such things" put in Stanley. "It makes me sick clean to the heels every time I think of it. But I suppose college days can't last forever. We've got to go out into the world, just as our fathers did before us."

"Yes, and I've got to get into business," answered Sam. "I want to help father, as well as Dick and Tom, all I can."

"Hi, fellows!" was the unexpected cry from the lower end of the campus. "Here come the freshies and the sophs back! Line up and be ready to receive them!"

"That's it! Line up, line up, everybody!" ordered Stanley. "Give them our old song of victory!"

CHAPTER III

WHAT HAPPENED TO SONGBIRD

It was fully half an hour later before Sam Rover could break away from his college chums and run up to room Number 25, which he had formerly occupied with his brother Tom and which he now shared with Songbird Powell.

Nearly a week before, the youngest Rover had made a date with Grace Laning, inviting her, if the snow remained on the ground, to a sleighride that afternoon and evening. At that time Sam had forgotten completely that this day was the date set for the annual snowballing contest.

"I think I'll go anyway," he had remarked to Songbird, the day before. But then had come word to his roommate that Mr. Sanderson wanted him on a matter of importance, and Stanley, as the leader of the seniors, had insisted upon it that he could not spare both of his chums.

"All right, then," Sam had answered finally; "you can go, Songbird, and do what Mr. San-

derson wants you to, and I'll put off my sleigh-ride with Grace until after the contest;" and so it had been settled.

There were no public turnouts at the college, but Sam had arranged with Abner Filbury, who worked around the place with his father, to obtain for him a first-class horse and cutter from the Ashton livery stable.

"That horse is some goer, believe me!" remarked Abner, when he came to the door of Sam's room, to tell him that the turnout was in readiness. "You'll have to keep your eye on him, Mr. Rover."

"All right, Ab. Trust me to take care of him," returned Sam lightly. "Don't forget that I was brought up on a farm, and my Uncle Randolph had some pretty spirited animals."

"Have a good time, Sam!" cried Spud, who was present to see his chum depart. "Wish I was going to see such a nice girl."

"Oh, your time will come some day," answered Sam.

"Are you going directly to Hope?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"I expect to unless you want to ride along that far."

"Say! I'd like that first-rate," returned Spud,

eagerly. "I know some of the girls up there, and I'd like to call on them. I wouldn't mind walking back later on."

"Then come on if you are ready. I haven't any time to wait."

"Oh, I'm always ready," came from Spud; and he lost no time in bestowing himself beside Sam.

The latter gathered up the reins, gave a slight chirp to the horse, and away they sped out of the college grounds and on to the highway leading past Hope Seminary, which was about two miles distant.

The air was cool and bracing, and the snow on the highway well packed down, so that the cutter slid over it with ease. As Abner Filbury had said, the steed was a mettlesome one, and soon Sam found he had all he could do to hold the horse in.

"Some goer, that!" remarked Spud, as he pulled his cap down tighter to keep it from flying off. "Puts me in mind of a race horse."

"Yes, I shouldn't wonder but what he could make a mile in almost record time," responded Sam, as they flew along past the trees, bushes and occasional farm buildings which lined the roadway near Brill.

"You want to watch yourself with a horse

that goes as fast as that," returned Spud, with a chuckle. "If you don't, you'll get a mile or two past Hope before you know it;" and at this little joke Sam grinned.

Early in the ride they passed one or two cutters and several farm wagons. Then they reached a turn in the road, and to their surprise saw ahead of them a sign resting on a large wooden horse:

ROAD CLOSED

"Hello! What does this mean?" queried Sam, as he brought his horse to a standstill. "I didn't know this road was shut off."

"Oh, yes, I heard something about this, come to think of it," returned Spud. "They are going to move that old Jackson barn from one side of the road to the other, and they must have closed the road for that purpose. You'll have to take the old road on the left, Sam."

"I suppose so," grumbled the other. "Too bad, too, for this road was just about perfect for sleighing. But never mind, I suppose I can get through on the other road well enough."

They turned back a distance of less than two hundred feet, and then took to the side road which Spud had mentioned. This was more

hilly than the other, and ran through a long patch of timberland on which no houses were located.

"Hark! Don't I hear another sleigh coming?" questioned Spud, a minute later.

"Something is coming, that's sure," answered Sam. "Gracious me! Look at that!"

Coming to another bend of the woodland road, the youngest Rover had barely time to pull his steed well toward the right hand and almost into some bushes when another cutter hove into sight, coming along at a furious rate. The horse was on a gallop, and the man driving him, a fellow wrapped up in a heavy overcoat and with a fur cap pulled far down over his forehead, was using his whip freely.

"Wow! That fellow must be in some hurry," observed Spud, as the other turnout flashed past. "He isn't sparing his horse any."

"It's a lucky thing for me that I pulled in here as I did," returned Sam, and his tone of voice showed his anger. "If I hadn't done it he would have run into us, sure pop."

"You're right, Sam. That fellow had no right to come along in that fashion. He ought to be arrested for reckless driving. But maybe he wants to catch a train at Ashton or something like that."

"No train he could catch for an hour and a

half, Spud. And he could walk to the station in that time;" and thus speaking, Sam chirruped to the horse, and they resumed their ride.

A little farther on the woodland road made another turn, and here the way was uphill. The numerous rains of the summer previous had washed the rocks bare of dirt, and often the cutter bumped and scraped so badly that Sam was compelled to bring his steed down to a walk.

"Well, one satisfaction, we'll be back to the main road before long," observed Spud, as they finally reached the top of the hill and could get a view of the surroundings. "There is the other road just below us."

"Hello! What's that ahead?" cried Sam, pointing with his left hand. "Looks to me like somebody lying in the snow."

"It is somebody!" exclaimed his chum. "Say! do you suppose that other horse was running away, and this fellow fell out?"

"Not much, with that other fellow using the whip as he was!" returned Sam. "This fellow ahead probably had nothing to do with that other cutter. Excepting he may have been knocked down by the horse," he added suddenly.

"That's what the trouble is! That rascal knocked this fellow down and then hurried on,

Sam! Poor fellow! I wonder if he is much hurt?"

By this time the cutter had reached a point opposite to where the person in the snow rested. All the boys could see was some person, wrapped in an overcoat, lying face downward. A cap that looked strangely familiar to Sam lay close at hand. Stopping the horse, Sam leaped from the cutter, and Spud did the same.

"Say, Sam!" burst out the latter, "it looks like——"

"Songbird!" burst out the Rover boy. "It's Songbird, Spud, and he's badly hurt."

It was indeed poor Songbird Powell who rested there in the snow by the roadside. He had on his overcoat and his fur-lined gloves, but his head was bare, and from a cut on his left temple the blood was flowing. The boys turned their college chum over, and at this Songbird uttered a low moan.

"He has either had an accident or been attacked," was Spud's comment. "I wonder how badly he's hurt?"

"I'm afraid it's pretty bad," answered Sam, soberly. "That's a nasty cut. And say! his chin is all swelled up as if he had been hit there with a club!"

The two boys knelt beside their unconscious

chum and did what they could to revive him. But Songbird did not open his eyes, nor did he make any other sound than a low moan.

"We'll have to get him somewhere out of this biting, cold air," observed Sam. "There is a farmhouse just below here on the main road. Let us put him in the cutter and carry him there."

When they picked Songbird up he uttered another moan and for an instant his eyes opened; but then he collapsed as before. They deposited him on the seat of the turnout, and Sam picked up his cap and several books that lay scattered around. With sober faces the boys led the mettlesome horse down the slope to the main road. Both kept their eyes on their chum, but he still remained insensible.

"Maybe he won't get over it," suggested Spud.

"Oh, don't say that!" cried Sam in horror. "It can't be as bad as that." And then he added: "Spud, did you notice the looks of that horse when he dashed past us?"

"I didn't have time to notice much," was the reply.

"Did he wear white stockings?"

"What? Oh! I know what you mean—white feet. Yes, he had white feet. I know that much."

"And did he have any white under his neck?"

"Yes, I think he did. Do you think you know the horse, Sam?"

"I know Mr. Sanderson has a horse with white feet and a white chest—a dark horse, just like that one was."

"Then it must have been Mr. Sanderson's horse and cutter!" cried Spud. "If it was, do you think that man was running away with the outfit?"

"I don't know what to think, Spud. To my mind it's a mighty serious piece of business. But our first duty is to do all we can for poor Songbird."

Arriving at the nearest farmhouse, Spud ran ahead and knocked on the door. A woman answered the summons, and as she happened to know the youth, she readily consented to have Songbird brought in and laid on a couch in the dining-room. Hardly had this been done when the sufferer slowly opened his eyes.

"Don—don't hit m-m-me again!" he murmured. "Ple-please don't!"

"It's all right, Songbird. Don't you know me?" said Sam, quietly.

The injured collegian opened his eyes again and stared at the youth before him.

"Sam! Wh-where did you co-come from?"

"Spud and I found you on the road, face down

in the snow," answered Sam. "What happened? Did you fall out of the cutter, or were you attacked?"

"I—I—— Oh! how my head spins!" muttered Songbird. He closed his eyes again and was silent for a moment. Then he looked once more at Sam.

"I was attacked," he mumbled. "The man—he hit me—with a club—and hauled me out of the cutter."

"It must have been the fellow we saw on the road!" exclaimed Spud. "Songbird, why did he do it?"

"I—I—do-don't know," mumbled the sufferer. "But maybe I do!" he suddenly shouted, in a strangely unnatural voice. Then with a sudden strength born of fear, he raised his left hand and dived down into the inner pocket of his coat. "The package! It's gone!"

"The package! What package?" queried Sam.

"The package belonging to Mr. Sanderson!" gasped poor Songbird. "The package with the four thousand dollars in it! It's gone!" and with another groan Songbird lapsed once more into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHASE

It must be confessed that Sam and Spud, as well as the woman of the house, were very much surprised over the statement made by Songbird.

"Attacked and robbed!" murmured Sam. "What an awful thing to do!"

"He said he had been robbed of four thousand dollars!" broke in Spud. "Where in the world would he get that much money? He must be dreaming, Sam."

"I hardly think so, Spud. I know he was to go on a very important errand for Mr. Sanderson, who is laid up at home with a sprained ankle."

"Well, if Songbird was robbed, it's more than likely the fellow we saw in the cutter did it."

"Exactly! And the chances are he will get away just as fast as he possibly can," added Sam, bitterly.

"What do you think we ought to do?"

"I think we ought to notify the authorities, Spud."

"Hadn't we better wait until we get some particulars from Songbird?"

"Not much! The quicker we get after that fellow the better. Remember he is running away not only with the money but also with Mr. Sanderson's horse and cutter. Many people living in this vicinity know Mr. Sanderson's animal, and that may help us to locate that rascal." Sam turned to the woman of the house. "Have you a telephone?"

"No, we haven't any; but the folks in the next house up the road have one."

"Then I'll go there and telephone," said Sam. "You do what you can for Songbird, Spud. I'll try to get a doctor, too, while I'm at it."

In a few seconds more Sam was on the way, using his horse and cutter for that purpose. Arriving at the next farmhouse, he readily received permission to use the telephone, and at once got into communication with the authorities in Ashton, and asked the official in charge to send word around to the various towns and villages within the next ten or fifteen miles, and he also sent word to a physician at Ashton. Then he managed to get Grace on the wire.

"I'm afraid I'll be late," he told the girl. "And

maybe I won't be able to get there at all," he added. "Songbird has been knocked down on the road and robbed, and he is in pretty bad shape."

"Oh, Sam! isn't that too bad!" was Grace's reply. "Do you mean that he is seriously injured?"

"We can't tell yet, Grace. I have just telephoned for the doctor, and now I am going back to the Bray farmhouse, where Songbird is, to wait for him." And after that Sam gave the girl as many details of the affair as he deemed necessary.

"Oh! I hope he gets over it, Sam," said Grace. "And to think he was robbed of all that money! If they can't get it back, what ever will Songbird and the Sandersons do?"

"I don't know," he returned. "It certainly is a bad piece of business. But now I've got to go back, so I'll say good-bye."

"Good-bye, Sam, and you stay with Songbird just as long as you please. We can have our sleighride some other time."

When Sam returned to the Bray farmhouse he found that Spud and the lady of the house had washed Songbird's wound and bound it up. The lady had also brought forth some simple home remedies, and these had been so efficacious

that Songbird was sitting on the couch, propped up by numerous pillows.

"Did you catch him?" asked the sufferer eagerly, as Sam entered.

"I've sent word to the police, Songbird, and sent word for a doctor too. Now you had better take it easy until the doctor comes."

"But how can I take it easy with that four thousand dollars missing?" groaned the youth on the couch. "Why, I can't make that amount up, and Mr. Sanderson can't afford to lose it."

"How does your head feel?"

"It feels sore all over, and sometimes spins like a top. But I wouldn't care about that if only I could get that money back. Can't you and Spud go after that rascal?"

"I'm willing if you want us to, Songbird; but you'll have to promise to stay here until the doctor comes. We don't want you to attempt to do anything while you are in your present condition."

"Oh, I'll stay here, don't fear," answered Songbird, grimly. "I just tried to stand up, and I went in a heap, and Spud and the lady had to put me back on this couch."

"Let's take that horse of yours and go after that fellow, Sam," burst out Spud, eagerly. "That horse is a goer, as we know, and we ought

to be able to catch that man sooner or later."

"Providing we can follow his trail, Spud," answered Sam. "You must remember there are a good many side roads around here, and he can take to any one he pleases."

"But we might be able to find the footprints of the horse in the snow."

"Possibly, although I doubt it, with so many other horses using the highway. However, come on, we'll do the best we can." Sam turned again to the sufferer. "Now, Songbird, you keep quiet until the doctor comes, and then you do exactly as he orders."

"Maybe Mrs. Bray will see to that," ventured Spud.

"I will if you want me to," responded the woman of the house. "That cut on his head is a nasty one, and if he doesn't take care of himself it may make him real sick."

In a moment more Sam and Spud were out of the house and into the cutter, which was then headed up the side road where they had found Songbird. Here they stopped for an instant to take another look around, and picked up two more books which had escaped their notice before.

"Books of poetry, both of 'em," remarked Spud. "Songbird thinks more of a poem than he

does of a square meal," and he smiled a bit grimly.

It did not take long to reach the spot where the other cutter had passed them. They went straight on, soon reaching the point where the woodland road joined the main highway.

"Now, you see, here is where we are going to get mixed up," announced Sam, as they moved in the direction of Brill. "Did the fellow go straight to Ashton, or did he turn off to one of the other places?"

"The folks traveling along the road must have seen him," returned Spud. "Let us make some inquiries as we go along."

This was a good suggestion, and was carried out. They found a farmer who had seen the strange man in the cutter drive toward Ashton, and a little later they met two ladies in a sleigh who declared that the fellow had turned into a side road leading to a hamlet known as Lester's Corners.

"If he went there, we ought to have a chance to catch him," cried Spud. "This road I know doesn't go beyond the Corners."

"Yes. But he could take a road from there to Dentonville," answered Sam, "and you know that is quite a railroad station."

"But if he went to Dentonville and to the rail-

road station, couldn't you telephone to the operator there to have him held?"

"Maybe, Spud, providing there is any telephone at the Corners."

Onward they went once more, through some heavy woodland and then over several small hills, finally coming in sight of the Corners, where were located a general store, a blacksmith's shop, a chapel, and about a dozen houses.

"Did I see a feller in a cutter goin' as fast as he could?" repeated the storekeeper, when questioned by Sam. "You just bet I did. Gee whiz! but he was goin' to beat the band!"

"And which way did he head?" questioned the Rover boy, eagerly.

"Headed right straight for Dentonville."

"And how long ago was this?" put in Spud.

"Oh, about quarter of an hour, I should say. Say! he nearly skeered old Mrs. Rasley to deth. She was a-crossin' the road comin' to my store when he swung aroun' that corner yonder, and he come within a foot of runnin' over her. She wanted to git Joe Mason, the constable, to arrest him, but, gee whiz! there wasn't no arrestin' to it—he was out o' sight before you could say Jack Robinson."

"Have you any telephone connection with Dentonville?" questioned Sam.

"Ain't got no telephone here at all. The telephone fellers promised to put a line through here three years ago, but somehow they hain't got around to doin' it. You see, Squire Buzby owns some of their stock, and he don't think that we ought to——"

"That's all right, Captain," broke in Sam, hastily. "Then if we want to catch that fellow, all we can do is to go after him, eh?"

"Thet's about the size on it," returned the storekeeper. "Now you see if we had thet telephone here, we might be able to——"

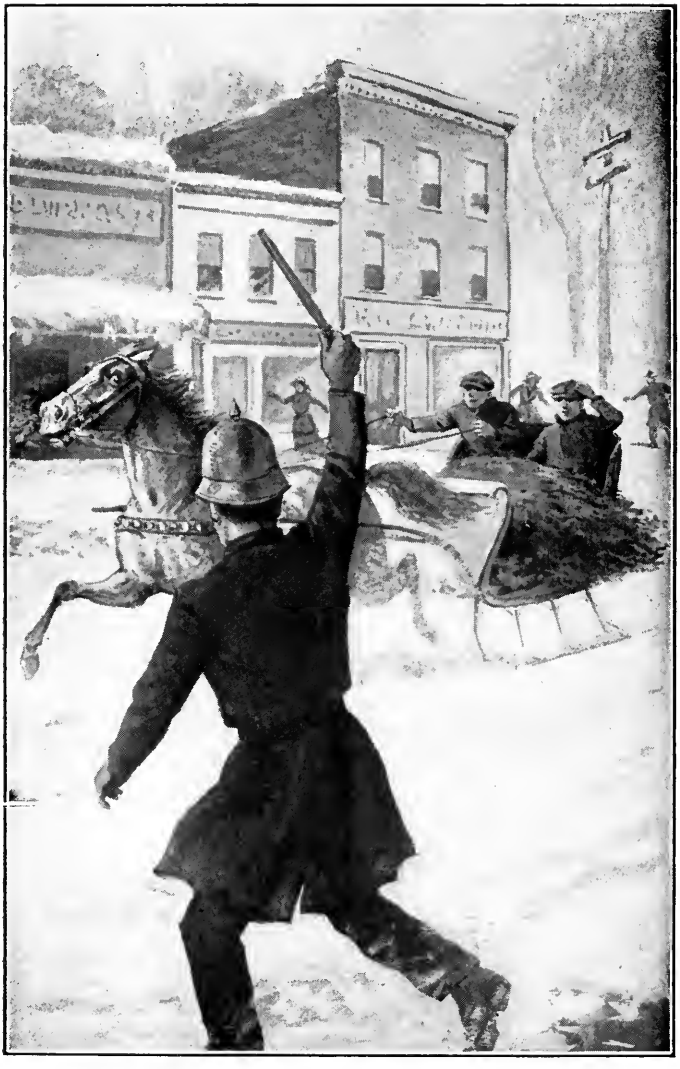
"That's so, we might. But as the telephone is missing, we'll go after him in our cutter," broke in Sam; and a few seconds later he and Spud were once more on their way.

The road to Dentonville was not much traveled, and for a mile and a half they met no one. Then, just as they reached a crossing, they came in sight of an old farmer driving a box-sled filled with milk cans.

"Did you meet a man driving a horse and cutter very rapidly?" questioned Sam, after he drew up. "A dark horse with a white breast and white feet?"

"I jest guess I did!" replied the farmer. "He come pretty close to runnin' into me."

"Which way was he headed?"



A BLUE-COATED POLICEMAN SHOOK HIS CLUB AT THE BOYS.

The Rover Boys on a Tour. *Page* **45.**

"Headed straight for Dentonville."

"Can you tell me when the next train stops there?"

"The train is due there in about fifteen minutes, and she won't stop more'n long enough to put my milk cans on board. I jest left 'em there, and got these empty ones," explained the farmer, pointing to the cans behind him.

"Fifteen minutes!" cried Spud. "And how far is it from here?"

"Nigh on to three miles."

"Is it a good road?" queried Sam.

"Pretty fair. It's some washed out on the hills, but the snow has covered the wo'st of the holes. Want to ketch that feller?"

"We certainly do. That horse and cutter belongs to Mr. Sanderson."

"By gum! You don't say! Did he steal the turnout?"

"He certainly did," answered Spud, "and nearly killed a young fellow in the bargain."

"Then I hope you ketch 'im," answered the farmer, and stood up in his sled to watch Sam and Spud as they sped once more along the highway leading to Dentonville.

The boys had a long hill ahead, and before the top was gained the horse attached to the cutter was glad enough to settle down to a walk. But

once the ridge was passed, he did not need much urging, and flew along almost as rapidly as ever.

"This horse must have been in the stable for quite some time," remarked Spud. "He evidently enjoys the outing thoroughly."

"Listen!" cried Sam, a little later. "Isn't that the whistle of a locomotive?"

"It sure is, Sam! That must be the train coming into Dentonville!"

They were passing through a small patch of timber, and directly beyond were the cleared fields and the buildings of a tidy farm. As the boys came out of the woods they looked over the fields in the direction of Dentonville and saw a mixed train, composed of several passenger coaches and a string of freights, entering the station.

"There she is!" cried Sam. "Oh, if only we can get there before she leaves!"

He spoke to the horse and did what he could to urge the steed forward at a greater rate of speed than ever. Much to the astonishment of several onlookers, they dashed into the outskirts of Dentonville and then along the main street leading down to the railroad station.

"Hi! Stop!" roared a voice at them, just as they were crossing one of the side streets, directly in front of a sleigh and two wagons. "Hi!

Stop, I tell you! You ain't got no right to drive that fast here in town," and a blue-coated policeman, one of the four of which the place boasted, shook his club at the boys and ran out in front of their cutter.

"Say! officer, you are just the man we want," cried Sam, hurriedly. "Come on with us. We want to have a man arrested down at the depot before he has a chance to get away on the train."

"What's that? Want a man arrested?" queried the bluecoat. "What has he done?"

"A whole lot of things," broke in Spud. "Jump in; we haven't any time to explain now —that train may pull out at any moment."

"That's so; so it might," replied the officer; and then, as Spud made room for him, he sprang into the cutter, sitting on the boy's lap. "But you look out that you don't kill somebody," he added to Sam, who was now using the whip lightly to urge the horse to greater efforts.

They were still two blocks away from the railroad station when there came a whistle, followed by the clanging of a bell, and then they saw the train moving away.

"There she goes!" groaned Spud. "But she isn't moving very fast."

"Maybe we can catch her yet," returned Sam; and then the race continued as before.

CHAPTER V

AT THE RAILROAD STATION

"See anybody, Sam?"

"Nobody that looks like that man, Spud, but there is Mr. Sanderson's horse with the cutter."

"Yes, I spotted those right away. Look how the poor nag is heaving. He must have been driven almost to death."

"That may be. Although we got here almost as quickly as he did. But he may have been used quite some before this trip," returned Sam; and this surmise was correct.

The two boys, with the policeman, had done their best to catch the departing train and have it stop, but without avail. When they had reached the depot the last of the cars was well down the line, and soon the train had disappeared around a curve of the roadbed.

"What's the matter, Ike? What are you after?" queried the freight agent, as he came up to the policeman.

"We are after the man who was driving that cutter yonder," explained Sam. "Did you see him—a big fellow with a heavy overcoat and with a fur cap pulled down over his forehead?"

"Why yes, I saw that fellow get aboard," answered the freight agent. "I was wondering what he was going to do with his horse. He didn't even stop to put a blanket over the animal."

"That fellow was a thief," explained Sam. "I wonder if we can't have him captured in some way? What is the next station the train will stop at?"

"Penton."

"How far is that from here?"

"About six miles."

"And after that?"

"She'll stop at Leadenfield, which is about six miles farther."

"Then I'll send a telegram to Penton and another to Leadenfield to have the train searched and the man arrested if he can be spotted," said Sam; and a few minutes later he was in the telegraph office writing out the messages. He described the man as well as he could, but realized that his efforts were rather hopeless.

"Maybe Songbird could give us a better description," he said to his chum; "but as Song-

bird isn't here, and as we can't get him on the telephone, we'll have to do the best we can."

The policeman was, of course, anxious to know some of the details of what had occurred, and when the boys told him that their college chum had been knocked senseless and robbed of four thousand dollars he was greatly surprised.

"It's too bad you didn't get here before the train started," he observed. "If you had we might have nabbed that rascal and maybe got a reward," and he smiled grimly.

"We don't want any reward. We simply want to get that four thousand dollars back," returned Sam. "And we would like to put that fellow in prison for the way he treated our college chum."

"What will you do with the horse and cutter?"

"If there is a livery stable handy, I think I'll put the horse up there," answered Sam. "He is evidently in no condition to be driven farther at present. I'll notify Mr. Sanderson about it." And so it was arranged.

A little while later, after the two boys had walked around to the police station with the officer and given such particulars as they were able concerning the assault and robbery, Sam and Spud started on the return to the Bray farmhouse. When they arrived there, they found that

Dr. Havens and Dr. Wallington had come in some time before. By the directions of the head of Brill the physician from Ashton had given Songbird a thorough examination and had treated him with some medicine from his case.

"The cut on his head is rather a deep one," said the doctor to the boys, "but fortunately it is not serious, nor will there be any bad effects from the blow on his chin. He can thank his stars though that the crack on his head did not fracture his skull."

"We are going to take him back to Brill in a large sleigh," said Dr. Wallington, "and then I think the best he can do will be to go to bed."

"Oh, I can't do that!" broke in Songbird, who was still on the couch, propped up by pillows. "I've got to get to Mr. Sanderson's and explain how the thing happened."

"You had better let me do that, Songbird," answered Sam, kindly. "I can drive over there and Spud can go with me. You just let us know exactly how it occurred." This, of course, was after the boys had related the particulars of their failure to catch the fleeing criminal at Dentonville.

"It happened so quickly that I hardly realized what was taking place," answered the would-be

poet of Brill. "I was driving along from Knoxbury, where I had been to the bank for Mr. Sanderson, when I came to the spot where I suppose you found me. Just as I reached there a man in a heavy overcoat, and with a thick fur cap pulled over his face so that I could hardly see him, stepped in front of the cutter.

"'Say! can you tell me where these people live?' he asked me, and thrust a sheet of paper towards me. 'I've lost my eye-glasses, and I can't see to read without them.'

"I took the paper he handed out and started to look at some writing on it which was very indistinct. As I bent over the paper the man swung a club or something in the air and struck me on the head. Then, as I tried to leap up and defend myself, he hit me another blow on the chin. That seemed to knock me clean out of the cutter; and that is all I know about it."

"Then you don't know where that fellow came from?" queried Spud.

"No more than that he came from the bushes beside the road." Songbird seemed to meditate for a moment. "Now I come to think of it though, maybe that's the same fellow that watched me go into the bank at Knoxbury and get the money for Mr. Sanderson!" he cried, suddenly.

"It was a very unwise move on Mr. Sanderson's part to have you get that money for him in cash," observed Dr. Wallington. "I do not understand why he could not have transacted his business with a check, especially if it was certified."

"I don't know much about that part of it," answered Songbird, "excepting he told me that the old man with whom he was doing business was something of a crank and didn't believe in banks or checks, and said he wanted nothing but solid cash. It's a pity now that Mr. Sanderson didn't use a check," and Songbird heaved a deep sigh.

"But what did you just say about a man watching you when you went into the bank?" questioned Sam.

"Oh, I noticed that fellow hanging around the building just as I went in," returned Songbird. "He was asking the janitor about the trains out of town, and the reason I noticed him was because he had a peculiar stutter and whistle when he talked. He went like this," and Songbird imitated a man who was stuttering badly, ending in a faint whistle.

"Great Scott! A fellow ought to know a man who talked like that anywhere," was Spud's comment. "Should be able to pick him out in the

dark," and at this sally even Dr. Wallington smiled faintly.

"Of course I'm not sure that that man had anything to do with it," went on Songbird. "But he was the only fellow around who seemed to notice me when I got the money. When the bills were passed over to me, there were forty one-hundred-dollar bills. I took them to a little side stand, to place them in a wallet Mr. Sanderson had lent me, and then I wrapped the wallet in a piece of paper with a stout string around it. As I did this I noticed the man who stuttered and whistled peering at me hungrily through a side window of the bank."

"And the fellow wore a heavy overcoat and a fur cap?" questioned Sam.

"Yes, I am sure of that."

"Then it is more than likely he was the guilty party," remarked Spud.

"But hold on a minute!" broke in Sam. "You got the money at Knoxbury, and this attack took place on the road above here, which is at least seven miles from that place. Now, if the man who did the deed was at the bank when you drew the money, how did he get here in time to hold you up?"

"I don't know about that, Sam; but I didn't leave Knoxbury immediately after getting the

money. I had an errand to do for Minnie. She wanted me to pick out a—er—a necktie for my birthday, and I—well, I looked around two or three stores, trying to find something nice to take back to her. I bought two books of poetry, but I don't know where they are now."

"We found them on the road, and they are out in the cutter," answered Sam. "Spud, you might bring them in and give them to Songbird."

"The errands kept me in town for about half an hour after I was at the bank," continued the youth who had been attacked.

"And where had you left Mr. Sanderson's cutter in the meantime?"

"Right in front of the bank building, the horse tied to a post."

"That would give the man time to get another turnout in which to follow you," said Sam.

"But if he did that, I don't see how he got ahead of you."

"Well, maybe he didn't, and maybe it was some one else who did the deed," returned Sam.

"You had better not worry your head too much about this affair, Mr. Powell," said Dr. Havens. "That crack on the head might have been more serious, but at the same time you ought to take care of yourself for a day or two at least."

"Then you don't think I ought to go to Mr.

Sanderson's?" queried the would-be poet of the college.

"Not just yet. If you feel stronger you might go there to-morrow, or the day after."

"Then will you go, Sam, and try to explain matters?" questioned Songbird, eagerly.

"Of course I'll go, Songbird."

"And I'll go with him," added Spud.

A large sleigh had been brought to the farmhouse by Dr. Wallington, and Songbird was placed in this and made as comfortable as possible among the robes and blankets which it contained. Mr. Bray, the owner of the farm, had been up in the timber bringing down some firewood, and now, when he approached, the others saw that he had tied behind his sled an extra horse.

"Hello! Where did that horse come from?" cried Sam. "Is it yours?"

"No, 'tain't mine," said Timothy Bray. "I found it up in the woods right near the road yonder," and he pointed with his hand as he spoke.

"Found that horse in the woods!" cried Spud. "Then that explains it."

"It sure does," returned Sam.

"Explains what?" demanded Timothy Bray. "What's goin' on down here anyway?" he con-

tinued, looking at his wife and then at the others.

"Oh, Timothy! an awful thing has happened!" cried Mrs. Bray, and then she and the others gave the farmer a few of the particulars. He listened with mouth wide open, and then looked at the horse which he had found.

"I guess you are right!" he exclaimed. "That feller got this horse in Knoxbury. It's one that belongs to Hoover, the livery stable man. I know him on account of this brand on his left flank. It's a horse Cy Tamen used to own and swapped for a bay mare."

"Then I think that explains it," declared Sam. "That rascal saw Songbird get the money, and he at once went to the livery stable and hired the horse and followed Songbird to the spot where the attack was made. More than likely he passed Songbird on the road."

"That's just what he did!" cried the youth who had been struck down. "I remember now! I was busy composing some poetry when I noticed a fellow on horseback go past me and disappear around a turn in the road, and that was just a few minutes before that fellow came up with a sheet of paper, and knocked me senseless."

"I believe you have made out a pretty clear case," was Dr. Wallington's comment. "Now

if we can only reach that man who stuttered and whistled, I think we shall have the culprit."

"We telephoned ahead from Dentonville. If they can only locate him on the train it will be all right," answered Sam. "But you must remember we didn't have very much of a description to go by."

"Yes, and that fellow may be fixed to change his appearance a good deal," added Spud. "A man isn't going to get his hands on four thousand dollars without doing all he possibly can to get away with it, especially when he knows that if he is caught he will be sent to prison."

"What am I going to do with this horse?" questioned Timothy Bray.

"You had better keep that animal in your stable until the livery man from Knoxbury calls for him," answered Dr. Wallington.

"He'll have to pay me for doing it," was Mr. Bray's reply. "Every time I go to Knoxbury, Hoover charges me an outrageous price for putting up at his stable, and now I can get even with him," and he chuckled over the thought.

CHAPTER VI

AT THE SANDERSON HOME

It was just about supper time when Sam, accompanied by Spud, drove into the lane beside the Sanderson farmhouse, which was lit up from end to end.

Evidently Minnie Sanderson, the pretty daughter of the farmer, had been on the watch, for as they approached the house she came out on a side piazza to meet them.

"Why, Songbird! what kept you so long?" she cried, and then added: "Who's that with you?"

"It isn't Songbird, Minnie," answered Sam, after he sprang out of the cutter, followed by Spud. "We've got some news for you."

"Oh, Sam Rover!" exclaimed the girl. "And Will Jackson! Whatever brought you here? Where is Songbird—do you know anything about him?"

"Yes, we do; and that is what brought us here," answered Sam.

"Oh, Sam! you don't mean that—that some-

thing has happened to John?" faltered the girl, turning pale.

"Yes, something did happen, Minnie, but don't be alarmed—he isn't hurt very much. Come into the house and we'll tell you and your father all about it."

"Hurt! Oh, are you sure it isn't serious? Now please don't hold anything back."

"I'll give you my word, Minnie, it isn't serious. The doctor said he would be as well as ever in a few days, but he is rather knocked out, and the doctor said he had better not try to come here. So then he asked Spud and me to come."

While Sam was speaking he and Spud had led the girl back into the house. She was very much agitated and her manner showed it.

"But what was it, Sam? Do tell me. Did that horse run away with him? I know John isn't much of a driver, and when he gets to composing poetry he doesn't notice things and becomes so careless——"

"No, Minnie, it was not that. Where is your father? We'll go to him and then we'll tell you the whole story."

"What's this I hear?" came from the dining-room, where Mr. Sanderson rested in a Morris chair, with his sprained ankle perched on a foot-

stool. "Where is John? And what about that money he was to get for me?"

"Good evening, Mr. Sanderson," said Sam, coming in and shaking hands, followed by Spud. "We've got some bad news for you, but please don't blame Songbird—I mean John—for I am sure he was not to blame."

"That's right!" broke in Spud. "What happened might have occurred to any of us. I think we ought to be thankful that Songbird—that's the name we all call John, you know—wasn't killed."

"Oh, but do tell me what did happen!" pleaded Minnie.

"And what about my money—is that safe?" demanded Mr. Sanderson.

"No, Mr. Sanderson. I am sorry to say the fellow who attacked Songbird got away with it."

"Gone! My four thousand dollars gone!" ejaculated the farmer. "Don't tell me that. I can't afford to lose any such amount. Why! it's the savings of years!" and his face showed his intense anxiety.

"Oh, so John was attacked! Who did it? I suppose they must have half killed the poor boy in order to get the money away from him," wailed Minnie.

"We might as well tell you the whole story

from beginning to end," answered Sam, and then, after he and Spud had taken off their overcoats and gloves, both plunged into all the details of the occurrence as they knew them.

"And he was hit on the head and on the chin! Oh, how dreadful!" burst out Minnie. "And are you positive, Sam, it was not serious?"

"That is what Dr. Havens said, and he made a close examination in the presence of Dr. Wallington."

"He ought to have been more careful," said Mr. Sanderson, bitterly.

"But. Pa! how could he have been?" interposed the daughter.

"Oh, in lots of ways. He might have placed that money inside of his shirt," answered the father. "It don't do to carry four thousand dollars around just as if it was—a—a—book of poetry or something like that," he added, with a touch of sarcasm.

"Pa, I think it's real mean of you to talk that way!" flared up Minnie. "John told me that he didn't much like the idea of bringing that four thousand dollars in cash from the bank, but he undertook the errand just to please you."

"Humph! Well, I was foolish to send him on the errand. I should have got some man who

knew how to take care of such an amount of cash."

"Mr. Sanderson, I don't think it's fair for you to blame Songbird," broke in Spud. "He did the best he could, and, of course, he had no idea that he was going to be attacked."

"It's all well enough for you to talk, young man," broke out the farmer, angrily; "it wasn't your four thousand dollars that was stolen. I wanted that money to pay off the mortgage on this farm. It's due to-morrow, and the reason I wanted cash was because old Grisley insisted on cash and nothing else. He lost a lot of money in the bank years ago, and that soured him, so he wouldn't take a check nohow. Now what I'm going to do if I can't pay that mortgage, I don't know. And me down here with a sprained ankle, too!" he added with increasing bitterness.

"You'll have to tell Mr. Grisley to wait for his money," said Sam. "When he learns the particulars of this affair he ought to be willing to wait."

"If I could only walk I'd get on the trail of that thief somehow," muttered Mr. Sanderson. "It's a shame I've got to sit here and do nothin' when four thousand dollars of mine is floatin' away, nobody knows where."

"We have notified the police and sent tele-

grams ahead, just as I told you," answered Sam. "I don't see what more we can do at present. Songbird was attacked so suddenly that he isn't sure that the fellow who did it is the same fellow he saw around the Knoxbury bank or not. But if he is the same fellow, we have a pretty fair description of him, and sooner or later the authorities may be able to run him down."

"Oh, I know the police!" snorted the farmer. "They ain't worth a hill of beans."

"Well, Songbird told me to tell you that if the money is not recovered, he will do all he can to make good the loss," continued Sam.

"Make good the loss? Has he got four thousand dollars?" questioned the farmer, curiously.

"Oh, no! Songbird isn't as wealthy as all that. He has only his regular allowance. But he said he'd work and earn the money, if he had to."

"Humph! How is he going to earn it—writing poetry? They don't pay much for that kind of writing, to my way of thinking."

"Now, Pa, please don't get so excited," soothed the daughter. "Let us be thankful that John wasn't killed. If he had been, I never would have forgiven you for having sent him on that errand."

"Oh, now, don't you pitch into me, Minnie!"

cried the father. "I've lost my four thousand dollars and that's bad enough. If I can't pay that mortgage, Grisley may foreclose and then you and me will be out of a home."

"Nothing like that will happen, Mr. Sanderson," said Sam.

"I don't know why."

"The mortgage is on this farm, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Is it the only mortgage you have, if I may ask?"

"It is."

"And what do you consider the farm worth?"

"Well, I was offered eight thousand dollars for it last year, and I refused to sell."

"Then I think it will be an easy matter to arrange to have the mortgage taken up by somebody else. Possibly my father or my uncle will do it."

"Will they?" demanded Mr. Sanderson, eagerly. "Well, of course, that would be some help, but, at the same time, it wouldn't bring my four thousand dollars back," he added glumly.

After that Minnie demanded to know more concerning Songbird's condition, and the two youths gave her every possible detail.

"If I had a telephone here I might send word to Ashton to find out if they had tracked that

rascal yet," said Mr. Sanderson. "But they asked so much money to put a telephone in over here I didn't have 'em do it."

"Where is the nearest telephone?" questioned Spud.

"Nothin' closer nor the railroad station at Busby's Crossing."

"That's only half a mile away," put in Sam. "We might drive over there now and see if there is anything new."

"You wait until you have had your supper," interposed Minnie. "It's all ready. I was expecting John, you know," and she blushed slightly.

"But if your father is anxious to get word——" began the Rover boy.

"Oh, I suppose you might as well wait and have somethin' to eat first," said the farmer. "That will give the authorities time to do somethin', if they are goin' to."

In the expectation of having Songbird to supper, Minnie, with the aid of a young hired girl, had provided quite an elaborate meal, to which it is perhaps needless to state the young collegians did full justice. Then the youths lost no time in driving off in the cutter to Busby's Crossing, where they were lucky enough to find the station agent still in charge, although on the

point of locking up, for no more trains would stop at the Crossing that night.

The boys first telephoned to the college and to Ashton, and then to Dentonville and the railroad stations up the line. To get the various connections took considerable time, and to get "information that was no information at all," as Spud expressed it, took much longer still. The sum total of it was that no one had been able to trace the man in the heavy overcoat and with the heavy fur cap, and no one had the slightest idea about what had become of that much-wanted individual.

"It's going to be like looking for the proverbial pin in the haystack," remarked Spud.

"It's too bad," returned Sam, gloomily. "I did think we'd have some sort of encouraging word to take back to Mr. Sanderson."

"Say! he's pretty bitter over the loss of that money, isn't he, Sam?"

"You can't blame him for that. I'd be bitter too."

"It looks to me as if he might make Minnie break with Songbird if that money wasn't recovered."

"Possibly, Spud. Although he ought to know as well as we do that it was not Songbird's fault."

"I'm glad to see Minnie sticks up for our chum, aren't you?"

"Oh, Minnie's all right and always has been. She thinks just as much of Songbird as he does of her. Once in a while she pokes a little fun at his so-called poetry, but Songbird doesn't mind, so it doesn't matter."

When the boys returned to the farmhouse Minnie ran out to meet them, and from their manner saw at once that they had no news worth mentioning. They could see that the girl had been crying, and now it was all she could do to keep from bursting into tears again.

"Oh, Minnie, you ought not to take it so hard," said Sam, kindly. "Of course, to lose four thousand dollars is a terrible blow, but maybe they'll get the money back some way, or at least a part of it."

"It isn't the money, Sam," cried the girl, with something like a catch in her voice. "It's the way papa acts. He seems to think it was all John's fault. Oh! I can't bear it! I know I can't!" she suddenly sobbed, and then ran away and up the stairs to her bedroom, closing the door behind her.

CHAPTER VII

SAM AND GRACE

"THIS whole affair is certainly a rough proposition," remarked Sam, when, about half an hour later, he and Spud were on their way back to Brill.

The time had been spent in telling Mr. Sanderson how they had failed to obtain any satisfaction over the telephone, and in listening to the farmer's tirade against poor Songbird.

"Old Sanderson certainly pitched into Songbird," returned Spud. "I declare if anybody called me down that way, I think I'd be apt to get into a regular fight with him."

"He is very much excited, Spud. I think when he cools down he will see matters in a different light. Just at present the loss of the four thousand dollars has completely upset him."

"I suppose he pitched into Minnie even more than he pitched into us."

"Maybe he did. I must say I am mighty sorry for that poor girl."

"What are you going to tell Songbird?"

"I suppose we'll have to tell him the truth, Spud, although we'll have to smooth over Mr. Sanderson's manner as much as we can. There's no use in hurting Songbird's feelings, especially now when he's broken up physically as well as mentally."

When they reached the college they found that Songbird had insisted upon it that he be taken to the room he occupied with Sam instead of to the sick ward. He was in bed, but wide awake and anxious to hear all they might have to say.

"Of course I knew Mr. Sanderson would blame me," he said, after asking a great number of questions. "Four thousand dollars is a heap of money." He knitted his brows for a moment, and then cast an anxious glance at Sam. "How did Minnie really seem to take it?" he continued.

"She sided with you, Songbird, when her father talked against you," answered Sam.

"She did, did she? Good for her!" and Songbird's face lit up for an instant. "She's true blue, that girl is!"

"Now, the best thing I think you can do is to try to go to sleep and get a good night's rest," went on Sam. "This worrying about what can't be helped won't do you any good."

"Yes, but, Sam, what am I going to do if that money isn't gotten back? The Sandersons can't afford to lose it, and even if I went to work right away, it would take me a long, long time to earn four thousand dollars."

"I have been thinking that over, Songbird, and as the money was to be used in paying off a mortgage, I think I can arrange the matter, providing the holder of the present mortgage won't extend the time for it. I think I can get my father or my uncle to take the mortgage."

"Very good, Sam, so far as it goes. But that wouldn't be getting the money back. If it isn't recovered, I'll feel that I am under a moral obligation to earn it somehow and give it to Mr. Sanderson."

"We'll talk about it later. Now you've got to go to sleep," were Sam's concluding words, and after that he refused to say any more. He undressed and threw himself on his bed, and was soon asleep. But poor Songbird turned and twisted, and it is doubtful if his eyes closed until well along in the early morning hours.

On the following day Sam had several classes to attend, as well as to work on a theme; but as soon as these tasks were over he obtained permission to leave the college to find out, if possible, if anything had been done in the matter of

the robbery. He visited Ashton and had an interview with the police, and then used the telephone in several directions. But it was all of no avail; nothing whatever had been seen or heard of the rascal who had made the attack upon Songbird.

"I'm afraid it will be one of those mysteries which will never be explained," mused the youngest Rover boy, as he jumped into the cutter which he was using and drove away from Ashton. "It's too bad! Oh! how I'd like to get my hands on that rascal, whoever he may be!"

It was not until two days later, when Songbird was once more able to be about and had insisted on being driven over to the Sanderson place, that Sam had a chance to go on the sleighride with Grace Laning. He drove over to Hope Seminary about four o'clock in the afternoon, having sent word ahead that he was coming. Grace was waiting for him, and the pair speedily drove away, wistfully watched by a number of the girl students.

"It's so nice of you to think of me, Sam, when you've got so much to think about on poor Songbird's account," said Grace, as they were speeding out of the seminary grounds. "How is he?"

"Oh, he's doing better than we expected, Grace. He insisted on being driven over to the San-

dersons this afternoon. Stanley took him over, because none of us thought Songbird was strong enough to drive himself."

"I want you to give me all the particulars of the attack," said the girl, and this the youth did readily.

"It must have been the man who stuttered and whistled—the fellow Songbird saw at the Knoxbury bank," declared the girl, positively. "Wouldn't it pay to get a detective on his track?"

"Perhaps so, Grace. I think Songbird is going to mention that to Mr. Sanderson."

Sam did not want the girl to worry too much over what had occurred and so soon changed the subject. They talked about college and seminary matters, and then about affairs at home, and about matters in New York City.

"I just got another letter from Nellie to-day," said Grace. "She says that the apartment she and Tom have rented is perfectly lovely—every bit as nice as the one occupied by Dick and Dora."

"I'm glad they like it, Grace. But, believe me, it will be some job for Tom to settle down and be a staid married man! He was always so full of fun."

"Why, the idea, Sam Rover! Don't you think a man can be married and still keep full of fun?"

"Well, maybe, if he got such a nice girl as Nellie. Just the same, I'll wager Tom sometimes wishes he was back in good old Brill."

"Indeed! And do you think you'll wish you were back at Brill if ever you get married?" she asked slyly.

"Oh, I didn't say anything about that, Grace. I—I——"

"Well, it's just about the same thing," and Grace tossed her pretty face a trifle.

"Oh, now look here, Grace! You haven't any call to talk that way. I suppose when I get married I'll be just as happy as Dick or Tom. That is, providing I get the right girl," and he gazed at the face beside him very ardently.

"Sam Rover, you had better watch where you are driving, unless you want to run us into the rocks and bushes," cried the girl, suddenly. For, forgetting the steed for a moment, Sam had allowed the horse to turn to one side of the somewhat rough highway.

"I'll attend to the horse, never fear," he answered. "I never yet saw the horse that I couldn't manage. But speaking of letters, Grace, I had one from Dick day before yesterday and he made a suggestion that pleased me very much."

"What was that?"

"He suggested that if I graduate from Brill this coming June, as I expect to do, that we make up a party to occupy two or three automobiles and go off on a regular tour this summer, taking in the Middle West and maybe some other points."

"Oh, Sam, how grand! Of course he was going to take Dora along?"

"Yes. His idea was that if matters could be arranged at the offices in New York, that he and Dora, as well as Tom and Nellie, would go along and that we would go too, along with some others —say enough to make at least two automobile loads."

"Oh, I'd love an auto tour like that! Couldn't we have just the best times ever?" and Grace's pretty eyes sparkled in anticipation.

"When I got the letter I thought the same, and I also thought we might ask Songbird and Minnie—Dora and Nellie could chaperon her, you know. But now I don't know what we'll do about them. Most likely Songbird wouldn't feel like going if that money wasn't recovered, and more than likely Mr. Sanderson wouldn't let Minnie go."

"Oh, dear! I suppose the loss of that money will hang over Songbird like a big cloud forever," pouted the girl. "It's too bad! I don't

see why Mr. Sanderson couldn't have paid that mortgage with a check."

"Just exactly what we all say now, Grace. But that doesn't do any good."

"Are you sure you are going to graduate, Sam?"

"I certainly hope so. I am going to try my best not only to graduate, Grace, but to get as close to the top of the class as possible. Dick and Tom had to leave before they had a chance to graduate, so I want to make a good showing for the Rover family."

"It's the same with me, Sam. Nellie left to get married, and so did Cousin Dora, so I've got to do the best I can for our family next June."

"Then you hope to get through too?"

"Of course."

"How are the teachers treating you these days? Have you had any more trouble with Miss Harrow, or the others?"

"Not the least bit. They are all perfectly lovely, and Miss Harrow is so sorry that she ever thought Nellie had taken that diamond ring."

"Well, she ought to feel sorry," responded Sam. "It certainly put Nellie to a lot of trouble. Did that gardener who put the diamond ring in the inkwell ever come back to work at the seminary?"

"Andy Royce? Yes, he is working there. I have seen him several times. He is quite a changed man, and I don't think he drinks at all."

"Well, that's one good job done, Grace. That man's worst enemy was liquor."

Sam had arranged that they might remain out until nine o'clock that evening, and so drove Grace over to Knoxbury, where they went to quite a fashionable restaurant for dinner. Here they met several young men and girls they knew, and all had a most delightful time during the repast.

When Sam went outside to get his horse and cutter, which had been placed in a livery stable near by, he was surprised to encounter the very man he had mentioned but a short while before, Andy Royce, the gardener who had once been discharged from Hope Seminary for not attending properly to his duties and who, through the intercession of the Rovers and the Lanings, had been reinstated in his position.

"Good evening, Mr. Rover," said Andy Royce, respectfully, as he touched the cap he wore.

"Hello, Royce! What are you doing here?" asked the youth.

"Oh, I just drove over to Knoxbury to get some things for the seminary," replied Royce; and then stepping closer he added in a lower tone:

"I saw you going into Meeker's restaurant a while ago and I stayed here to see you when you came out. I'd like to talk to you a bit."

"All right. What have you to say?" returned Sam, briskly. "I haven't got much time to waste."

"I wanted to ask you about the young fellow who was knocked down and robbed the other afternoon," went on Andy Royce, as the two walked away, out of the hearing of the others in the livery stable. "Somebody told me that the fellow who was robbed said a man did it who stuttered and whistled."

"Well, we rather think that man did it, but we are not certain," answered Sam. He glanced sharply at the gardener. "Do you know anything of that fellow?"

"I think I do, Mr. Rover. You see it's this way: Several years ago I used to live out West, in Denver and Colorado Springs, and I used to know a man out there who went by the name of Blackie Crowden. He used to stutter fearfully and had a funny little whistle with it."

"Out in Denver, you say? That's a long way from here."

"I know it is, sir, but after I left I heard that this Blackie Crowden had come to Center Haven, and that's only twenty miles from here. And

that ain't all," continued Andy Royce, earnestly. "I was in this town about a week ago and I am almost certain I saw this same Blackie Crowden on the street. I tried to reach him so as to speak to him, but he got away from me in a crowd that had come up to see a runaway."

"This is interesting," returned Sam. "Tell me how this Blackie Crowden looks," he went on. And then as Andy Royce described the individual he added slowly: "That seems to tally with the description Songbird gave of the fellow who looked at him through the bank window when he was placing the money away. More than likely that fellow was that same Blackie Crowden."

"Well, if it was Blackie Crowden, why don't you have him locked up?" queried the gardener.

"Perhaps I will, providing he is still in Center Haven," answered Sam.

CHAPTER VIII

SOMETHING ABOUT BLACKIE CROWDEN

WHEN Sam returned to Brill late that evening, after having spent a most delightful time with Grace, he found that Songbird had returned from the Sandersons' homestead some time before. The would-be poet of the college was working hard over some of his lessons, and it was plainly to be seen that he was in anything but a good humor.

"Sanderson treated me like a dog—like a regular dog!" he burst out, in reply to Sam's question. "Why! to hear him talk you would almost think I was in league with the fellow who attacked me!"

"It's too bad, Songbird; but you shouldn't take it so much to heart. Remember, Mr. Sanderson is a very hard-working man and one who has probably never allowed another fellow to get the best of him in any kind of a deal. The amount that was lost represents probably the savings of a good many years, and to lose it so suddenly

and in such an underhanded way has completely upset him. When he has had time to think it over calmly he'll probably see that you were not to blame."

"I don't think so—he's not that kind of man," Sam. He was very bitter and he told Minnie that she wasn't to see me any more. Minnie was dreadfully upset, of course, and she rushed off to her room, so I didn't have any chance to say good-bye to her."

"As bad as that, eh? Well, you can write her a letter anyway."

"So I can; but maybe her father will see to it that she never gets it," responded the smitten youth, gloomily.

"I've got a little news that may prove encouraging," pursued Sam after a slight pause; and then he related the particulars of his meeting with Andy Royce, and what the Hope gardener had said regarding Blackie Crowden.

"Say! that's great!" burst out the would-be poet. "If I could see this Crowden I'd know at once if he was the man who watched me when I was at the Knoxbury bank, and if it was it would certainly pay to put the authorities on his trail."

"I was thinking the same, Songbird. I wonder if we couldn't get permission from Dr. Wal-

lington to drive over to Center Haven to-morrow and find out what we can about this Blackie Crowden?"

"Oh, he'll have to give us permission—at least he'll have to let me go," returned Songbird. "I can't settle down to any lessons until something is done, one way or another. Here I am, trying to study, and I hardly know a word of what I'm reading."

"Let us go to the doctor at once if he is still up and ask him," said Sam.

Permission to leave the college was readily granted by Dr. Wallington, who, however, cautioned Songbird about overexerting himself while he was still suffering from the attack that had been made upon him.

"I'll depend upon you, Rover, to look after him," said the head of Brill, kindly. "And let me add, I wish you every success in your search for the offender. I certainly would like to see you get Mr. Sanderson's money back."

The two young collegians had breakfast as early as possible, and by eight o'clock were on their way to Center Haven in the automobile belonging to the Rovers, and which had now been left in Sam's care. Heavy chains had been put on the wheels so that the automobile made its way over the snowy roads without much trou-

ble. Of course in some spots where the frozen highway was uneven, the boys got some pretty hard bumps, but this they did not mind, their one thought being to get to Center Haven as soon as possible and learn all they could concerning Blackie Crowden and his doings.

Center Haven was a town about the size of Knoxbury, and among other things boasted of a large hotel which was generally well patronized during the summer months. Andy Royce had said that Crowden had been seen at this hotel and probably had some sort of position there. When the boys arrived there they found that the main building of the hotel was completely closed. The only portion that was open was a small wing with an equally small dining room used for the accommodations of the few transients who came to Center Haven during the winter months.

"We came here to find a man named Blackie Crowden," said Sam to the proprietor of the hotel, who came forward to meet them when they entered. "Can you tell me anything about him?"

"You won't find him here," returned the hotel man, brusquely. "I discharged him two weeks ago."

"Discharged him?" queried Songbird, and his

tone showed his disappointment. "Any trouble with him?"

"Oh, yes, lots of trouble. Are you friends of his?"

"We certainly are not," answered Sam. "But we'd like to find out something about him."

"I'm glad you are not friends of his," continued the hotelkeeper. "I feel very sore over that man. I took him in and gave him a good job, and paid him a good deal more than he was worth. But he wouldn't work—in fact he was the laziest man I ever saw—and so I had to discharge him. I paid him all that was coming to him, and when he got out he was mean enough to sneak off with some of my clothing, and also a pair of my gloves and my rubbers. If I could lay my hands on him, I'd be strongly tempted to hand him over to the police."

"Did he take an overcoat of yours and a fur cap?" demanded Songbird, quickly.

"He certainly did. A heavy, dark-gray overcoat and one of these fur caps that you can pull down over your ears and over the back of the head."

"He must have been the same fellow," remarked Sam. "And the fact that he robbed this man here goes to prove what sort of rascal he really is."

"Did he steal anything from you people?" asked the hotelkeeper, curiously.

"I think he did," answered Songbird. "Did you hear anything of the attack that took place a few days ago on the road near Ashton, in which a young fellow was robbed of four thousand dollars in cash?"

"Oh, yes, I heard about that from the police captain here."

"Well, I am the fellow who was robbed," continued Songbird. "And I'm strongly inclined to think now that it was this Blackie Crowden who was guilty—in fact I am almost certain of it. When I was at the Knoxbury bank getting the money and putting it away in my pocket I saw a man watching through a window of the bank. He had on a dark-gray overcoat and a fur cap pulled far down over his face. Then, later on, just after I was attacked, my friend here with a chum of ours came driving along and saw this same man with the heavy overcoat and the fur cap drive off with the horse and cutter that I had had—and he was the same fellow who had knocked me senseless."

"Is that so! Well, I think you've hit the nail on the head, and if you catch this Blackie Crowden you'll have the right fellow. Anybody who would run off with my things as he did after he

had been treated as well as I treated him wouldn't be above committing such a crime. But the question is, where did he go? Have you any idea?"

"We know he got on the train at Dentonville," said Sam. "That's as far as we've been able to trace him so far. But now that we know that this criminal is Blackie Crowden, maybe the authorities will be able to run him down sooner or later."

"This Crowden was very friendly with one or two of the men around the stables," went on the hotelkeeper. "Maybe you can find out something about him from them."

"A good idea!" answered Songbird. "We'll see what they have to say."

The hotel man took the two youths to the stables, and there they talked with several men present who had known Crowden. From these they learned that the man had been very much dissatisfied with the work assigned to him, and had frequently spoken about the good times to be had in such large cities as New York, Chicago and Denver.

"He said he thought he would go back to New York first," said one of the stable men, "and then he thought he would go on to Chicago and after that visit some of his old places and cronies in

Denver. But, of course, where he really did go to I haven't the least idea."

"What you say is something of a clue anyway," returned Sam. "Now if we only had a photograph of this Crowden, it might help the police a great deal."

"We've got a picture of him," said one of the men present. "It was taken by one of the visitors at the hotel this fall. He came out here to take a picture of some of the horses and we helped him, so all of us got into the picture, Crowden with the rest. I'll get it," he added, and disappeared in the direction of his sleeping quarters.

The photograph was a fairly large one, showing three men and as many horses. The man in the center was Blackie Crowden, and the stable man and the hotelkeeper declared that it was an excellent photograph of that individual.

"Will you let us have this photograph?" asked Songbird. "I would like to have that picture of Crowden enlarged, and then you can have it back."

"Sure you can have it," answered the stable man. "As that fellow is a thief, you might as well tear that picture up afterward, because I don't want to be in no photograph with a criminal," and he grinned sheepishly.

"All right then, I won't take the trouble to return it," answered Songbird. "Suppose you accept this dollar for it," and he passed over a banknote, which the stable man took with thanks. A little later the two youths started on the return to Ashton.

"Well, that's one step nearer the solution of this mystery," announced Sam. "Now I think we had better stop at Knoxbury and find out about that horse which belonged to Hoover, the livery stable man."

They reached the banking town about noon, and went directly to the livery stable. As they did so a man in a cutter drove in, leading a horse behind him.

"There is the horse now!" cried Sam. "He must have just gotten the animal back from Mr. Bray."

"Are you Mr. Hoover?" questioned Songbird of the man in the cutter, as he came to a halt near them.

"That's my handle, young man. What can I do for you?"

"I would like to know something about that horse, and who hired him from you;" and then he introduced himself and Sam.

"I don't know who got the animal," answered Mr. Hoover. "I was away at the time, and a

stable boy let him out. He declares the fellow said he was a friend of mine, and that it would be all right."

"And was the fellow dressed in a heavy, gray overcoat and a heavy fur cap?" asked Sam.

"Yes, that was the description the stable boy gave. When he found I didn't know anything about the man he was scared to death, because I told him that if the horse didn't come back I'd make him pay for the animal."

"Then that's all we want to know, Mr. Hoover," answered Songbird. "I'm pretty sure now I know who it was that knocked me down and robbed me."

"He was a rascal, all right," answered the livery stable man. "I had to pay old Bray four dollars to get my own horse back," he added, sulkily.

As the long ride in the open air had made them hungry, the two youths went to the restaurant in Knoxbury for dinner. Then the automobile was turned once more in the direction of Ashton.

"I'll have that photograph enlarged by Clinger," said Songbird, referring to a photographer in the town who did a great deal of work for the Brill and Hope students. "Then I'll have copies sent to the various police stations, even to New

York, Chicago and Denver, along with a description of Blackie Crowden."

"That's the talk, Songbird. Oh, I am sure we'll get on his trail sooner or later," said Sam. But though he spoke light-heartedly for his chum's benefit, he knew that to trace the criminal would be by no means easy. With the four thousand dollars in his possession, Blackie Crowden would probably make every effort to keep from being discovered.

As they sped along the road, Songbird could not help becoming poetical, and despite his blueness he managed to concoct the following doggerel:

"The engine hums—advance the spark,
Turn on the throttle—what a lark!
Away we go like a flash of light
Over the hill and out of sight."

"Not so bad, Songbird," was Sam's comment. "That's right—keep it up and maybe you'll feel better." But that was the only verse to be gotten out of the would-be poet for the present.

Arriving at Ashton, they went immediately to the photographer's shop and told him what was wanted, and he agreed to re-photograph the picture of Crowden and then enlarge the same and make as many copies as Songbird desired.

"I'll do it this afternoon," said Mr. Clinger,

"and you can have a dozen or more copies by to-morrow morning. I'll make the head of the fellow about as large as a half dollar, and that ought to make a picture for any policeman or detective to go by;" and so it was arranged.

While the youths were at the photographer's an express train had come into Ashton and now quite a few people were coming away from the railroad station. As the boys walked towards the automobile, Songbird suddenly uttered a cry.

"Look, Sam! Look who's here!"

"Why, it's Tom! My brother, Tom!" exclaimed Sam, as he rushed forward. "What in the world brought him here to-day?"

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH TOM ARRIVES

Tom Rover, tall and broad-shouldered, looked the picture of health as he came toward his younger brother and Songbird. He smiled broadly as he shook hands with them.

"Why, Tom! What brings you here?" remarked Sam. "You didn't write about coming on."

"Oh, I thought I'd just drop in and surprise you," returned Tom. "You know I can't quite get used to being away from Brill," he continued, with a grin.

"Want to get back to your studies, I suppose," was his brother's dry comment. "Well, come ahead; you can help me on a theme I am writing on 'Civilization in Ancient Central America.'"

"Wow! that sounds as interesting as a Greek dictionary!" cried Tom. "Thank goodness! I don't have to worry my head about themes any more. But just the same, Sam, don't make any mistake. I am as busy these days as I ever was

in my life, trying to help Dick and dad to put our new organization on its feet."

"And how is that getting along?"

"Fine. We incorporated this week and have our papers, and now I am the secretary of The Rover Company," and Tom strutted around with his thumbs under his arms. "Some class to me, eh?"

"And what is Dick?" questioned Songbird, curiously.

"Oh, Dick is treasurer," answered Tom. "Dad, of course, is president, but he expects to hold that position only until Sam comes in. Then Dick is to become president; myself, treasurer; and Sam, secretary."

"Say! that's all right," responded the youngest Rover, his face showing his satisfaction.

"That is, provided you want to come in, Sam. Dad doesn't want you to give up your idea of becoming a lawyer unless you want to."

"Oh, I might become a lawyer and remain secretary of the company too," was the answer. "One thing is sure, if you and Dick are going to remain in that company you'll have to take me in."

"Well, what's the news?" went on Tom. "Had any fun lately? How is Grace?" and he looked rather sharply at his brother.

"Oh, Grace is all right," answered Sam. He hesitated a moment. "I suppose you didn't get the letter I sent to you and Dick yesterday—the letter about Songbird here?"

"Why no. I left the office night before last."

"Songbird is in trouble, Tom," returned the brother. "Are you going up to the college? If you are you can go with us in the automobile and we'll tell you all about it on the way."

"Yes, I'll go up, and I might as well take my grip with me, for maybe I'll stay over until to-morrow if they have room for me," and thus speaking Tom turned back to the railroad station to get his dresssuit case. The three youths were soon on their way to Brill, and as Sam manipulated the car he and Songbird gave the new arrival the details concerning the attack. Tom, of course, listened with deep interest.

"That's a rank shame, Songbird!" he cried, at the conclusion of the narrative. "I know just how you feel. If I could get my hands on that Blackie Crowden, I think I'd put him in the hospital first and in prison afterward."

"I told Songbird not to worry as far as the money was concerned," went on Sam. "If that old fellow who holds the mortgage won't wait for his money, I told Songbird that I thought we could get our folks to advance the cash."

"Sure thing!" responded Tom, promptly. "You give me the details and I'll see about the money when I go back."

"Mr. Sanderson said he would know about it early next week," answered Songbird. "He expects a visit from old Grisley and Belright Fogg."

"My gracious! You didn't tell me anything about Fogg being connected with this," burst out Sam.

"I forgot all about it," answered Songbird. "It seems that as soon as old Grisley heard the money was stolen and that it wasn't likely the mortgage would be paid, he hired Belright Fogg to take the matter up for him. He is an old man and very excitable, and he somehow got the notion that Mr. Sanderson would try to swindle him in some way. So he got Belright Fogg in the case, though as a general thing he has no more use for lawyers than he has for banks."

"Well, he's very foolish to put his case in the hands of such a fellow as Belright Fogg. Tom, I guess you'll remember the trouble we had with that fellow."

"I sure do, Sam!"

"And Sam had more trouble with him," cried Songbird. "Don't forget how you hit him in the head with a snowball."

"That's right. In the excitement of the attack on you, Songbird, I forgot all about that," answered the youngest Rover. "I suppose he is laying back to bring that up against me."

They soon reached the grounds surrounding Brill, and Tom looked at the college buildings with interest.

"Looks almost like home to me," he said somewhat wistfully. "My, but I had some good times here! I wish I had been on deck for that snowballing contest."

"Sam was the hero of that occasion, according to all accounts," answered Songbird. "He captured the banners of the freshies and sophs, you know."

As the automobile rolled into the grounds a number of students recognized Tom and waved friendly greetings to him. Leaping out, he was soon surrounded by a number of his old chums, all of whom wanted to know where he had been keeping himself and how long he was going to stay with them.

"Can't stay longer than to-morrow noon," he announced. "You know I'm a business man now," and he puffed up and grinned in a manner that made all of the others smile.

"You just came in time, Tom," cried Spud. "Your old friend, William Philander Tubbs, who

has been away on business to Boston, got back here this morning."

"What! My old friend Tubby here? I'll be glad to shake his flipper," announced Tom, and grinned more than ever as he recalled the practical jokes that had been played at different times on the dudish student who had been mentioned.

Of course the students present wanted to know what had been learned by Sam and Songbird on the trip to Center Haven, and many were the speculations regarding Blackie Crowden.

"The authorities ought to be able to catch that fellow now that you have his photograph and a good description of him," remarked Stanley. "It would be a good idea to send that description and photograph broadcast."

The boys reported to Dr. Wallington, and Tom went with them. The head of Brill was glad to see his former student, and readily consented to allow Tom to remain with the others that night, an extra cot being put into room No. 25 for that purpose.

"Are those the banners you captured, Sam?" questioned Tom, when the boys entered the room, and as he spoke he pointed to two banners which were nailed up on the wall.

"Yes, Tom, those are the ones we captured," was the reply of the youngest Rover, with con-

siderable pride. "The freshies and sophs wanted them back the worst way, but I told them there was nothing doing, that I intended to keep them at least until I graduated. They sent a committee to me to get the banners, and I can tell you that committee was pretty sore when they went away without getting them."

"You watch out that they don't take those banners on the sly, Sam."

"Oh, Songbird and I are looking out for them. Didn't you notice we had the door locked? We always lock up now, and no one has a key but the janitor, and we have cautioned him not to let any one in here without our permission."

"I'll tell you what I'd like to do to-night," said Tom. "I'd like to smuggle something to eat into this room and give some of our crowd a spread, just for the fun of it."

"All right, I'm willing, Tom," answered his brother. "Of course you'll have to keep rather quiet about it, because I don't want to get into the bad graces of any of the monitors or of Dr. Wallington. I want to graduate next June with the highest possible honors."

It was arranged that while Songbird and Sam studied some necessary lessons, Tom was to return to Ashton in the automobile and bring back a number of things which would be needed for

the proposed spread. Tom took Spud and Stanley with him. Out on the campus the three came face to face with William Philander Tubbs.

"Hello, Tubblets, old boy!" cried Tom cordially, as he caught William Philander by the hand. "How are you making it these days?"

"I—er—er—— How do you do, Rover?" stammered the dudish student. "Why, I am—er—am quite well, thank you. I thought you had left college?"

"Oh, I couldn't leave it for good, you know, Tubby, my dear. They wouldn't be able to get along without me."

"Why—ah—why—ah—somebody told me you were going into business in New York."

"That's right, Tubbette."

"Oh, Rover! please don't call me by those horrid nicknames any longer," pleaded William Philander. "You promised me long ago you wouldn't do it."

"Only a slip of my memory, my dear Philander Williams. I really——"

"No, no! Not Philander Williams. My name is William Philander."

"That's right! so it is. It's always been Philander William—No, I mean Willander Philiams—no, that isn't it either. My gracious, Tubblets, old boy! what have you done with the

front handles of your cognomen, anyway? You twist me all sideways trying to remember it."

"Really, how odd! My name is William Philander Tubbs. That's easy enough."

"If I had it engraved in script type on a visiting card and looked at it daily, maybe I would be able to remember it," answered Tom, mournfully. "You know my head was never very good for history or anything like that. However, now that I know that your name is Philander Tubblets Williams, don't you think you'd like to ride down to Ashton with us? We are going to have a little spread to-night, and I want you to help me pick out the spaghetti, sauerkraut, sweet potato pie, Limburger cheese, and other delicacies."

"Oh, by Jove! do you really mean you are going to have those things for a spread?" gasped William Philander.

"That is, if they are just the things you like," returned Tom, innocently. "Of course, Stanley here suggested that we have some fried eel sandwiches and some worm pudding. But I don't know about such rich living as that."

"Eel sandwiches! Worm pudding!" groaned William Philander, aghast. "I never heard of such things! Why don't you get—er—er—some cream puffs and chocolate éclares and er—and—

er—and mint kisses and things like that, you know?"

"Not solid enough, my dear Willie boy. The boys love substantials. You know that as well as I do. Of course we might add a few little delicacies like turnips and onions, just for side dishes, you know."

"I—I—really think you had better excuse me, Rover!" exclaimed William Philander, backing away. "I am not feeling extra good, and I don't think I want to go to any spread to-night," and William Philander bowed and backed still farther.

"Oh, all right, Philly Willy," responded Tom, dolefully. "Of course if you don't want to participate you don't have to, but you'll break our hearts if you stay away. Now you just come to room twenty-five to-night and we'll give you the finest red herring and mush ice cream you ever chewed in your life," and then he and his chums hurried away in the automobile, leaving William Philander Tubbs gazing after him in deep perplexity.

CHAPTER X

THE FEAST

When Tom came back accompanied by Stanley and Spud, all had their arms full of the things purchased in Ashton.

"And this is only the half of it," announced the fun-loving Rover to his brother, in answer to a query. "We've got to go back and get the rest out of the automobile."

"We'll bring that stuff up," said Stanley. "You stay here with your brother. Come on, Songbird, I see you are doing nothing, so you might as well give us a lift," and off the three boys trooped to bring up the rest of the things purchased for the feast.

"I'm mighty glad you are going to give this, Tom, on Songbird's account," announced Sam, when he and his brother were left to themselves. "Songbird is about as blue as indigo. You see, it isn't only the money—it's Minnie. Her father won't let him call on her any more."

"Tough luck, sure enough," responded Tom.

"Well, let us do all we can to-night to make Songbird forget his troubles." Tom took a walk up and down the room, halting in front of a picture of Grace which was in a silver frame on a chiffonier. "Pretty good picture, Sam," he observed.

"Yes, it is."

"Did you say that you had been out with Grace lately?"

"Oh, yes. We had a fine sleighride only the other day."

"She's made quite a friend of a Miss Ada Waltham at the seminary, a rich girl, hasn't she?"

"She has mentioned Miss Waltham to me. I didn't know that they were particularly friendly," answered Sam. "You know this Miss Waltham is very rich."

"So I heard, Sam. She is worth about a quarter of a million dollars, so somebody said. But she has a brother, Chester, who is worth even more. An uncle died and left nearly his entire estate to the brother."

"Is that so? Lucky young fellow! But I don't see how that interests me, Tom," and Sam looked at his brother inquiringly. "You act as if you had something on your mind."

"So I have, Sam; and that is one of the reasons I came here to-day," announced Tom. "I'll

tell you about it in the morning," he added hastily, as a tramping was heard in the hallway; and the next moment the door burst open and in came Stanley, Songbird, Spud and one or two others, all loaded down with bundles and packages.

"Make way for the parcels post and the express company!" proclaimed Spud, as he dropped several packages on one of the cots. "Say, Tom, you must have bought out half of Ashton."

"Only three-eighths, Spud," answered the fun-loving Rover, gaily. "You see I knew what an awful appetite you had, and as I had an extra twenty-five cent piece in my jeans I thought I'd try to satisfy that appetite just once."

"Twenty-five cents! Wow!" commented Stanley. "I'll wager this spread costs you a good many dollars."

Word had been passed around to a number of Tom's old friends, and they were all requested to be on hand by ten o'clock.

"Tubbs says he begs to be excused," announced Paul Orben when he came in. "He says he has got some studying he must do."

"Nonsense! He's afraid we'll treat him to some sauerkraut pie and some pickled pastry," returned Tom. "I don't want him to stay away and miss a good time. What room is he in?"

"Number eighteen."

"Then come along, some of you, and we'll bring him here," announced the fun-loving Rover, and marched off, followed by Spud and Bob. In the meanwhile, Sam, Songbird and Stanley brought the things from the closet and began to prepare for the feast.

Tom and his friends found William Philander busy folding and putting away half a dozen gorgeous neckties. He was rather startled at their sudden entrance, and did his best to hide the articles.

"Hello! I thought you were boning away on trigonometry or mental science," was Tom's comment. "Say, old boy, that's a gorgeous necktie," he added as he picked up a creation in lavender and yellow. "Did you buy this to wear at the horse show, or at a meeting of mothers' helpers?"

"Oh, my dear Rover, please don't muss that up!" pleaded William Philander, snatching the necktie from Tom's hands. "That is one that was—er—made—er—a—a present to me."

"Oh, I see. That's the one that blind young lady gave to you. I admire her taste in picking it out."

"Blind lady? I—er—have no blind lady friend," returned William Philander.

"Oh, yes, I remember now, Tubby, she was deaf—not blind. It's a wonder she didn't pick out something a little louder."

"Oh, Rover, I really believe you are poking fun at that necktie," returned the dudish student.

"We came to get you to come to the feast, Willie," announced Spud. "We don't want you to miss it."

"We wouldn't have you miss it for a peck of shelled popcorn," put in Bob.

"Yes, but really, I've got some studying to do, and——"

"You can study after the feast is over, my dear boy," broke in Tom, as he caught William Philander by the arm. "You'll be surprised how much quicker you can learn on a full stomach than on one that is half vacant. Come on!"

"Yes, but I——"

"We haven't any time to spare, Tubblets. You are going to the feast, so you might as well make the best of it. Come on, fellows, help him along. He's so bashful he can't walk," and thus urged, Spud took William Philander's other arm while Bob caught him by the collar and in the back, and thus the three of them forced the dudish collegian out of his room and along the hallway to Number 25.

By this time something like fifteen students had gathered in the room, and the advent of Tom and his chums with the somewhat frightened William Philander was greeted with a roar of approval. The dudish student was marched in and made to take a seat on a board which had been placed on two chairs. On the board sat several students, and William Philander was placed on one end.

"Now, then, everybody make himself at home," announced Tom, as soon as a look around had convinced him that his brother and the others had everything in readiness for the feast. "I believe you'll find everything here except toothpicks, and for those we'll have to chop up one of Sam's baseball bats later on."

"Not much! You're not going to touch any of my bats," announced the younger brother, firmly.

"Sam wants to keep them to help bat another victory for Brill this spring," put in Spud. "My! but that was one great game we had last season."

"So it was," put in another student. "And don't forget that Tom helped to win that game as well as Sam."

While this chatter was going on various good things in the way of salads and sandwiches had

been passed around, and these were followed by cake and glasses of root beer, ginger ale and grape juice.

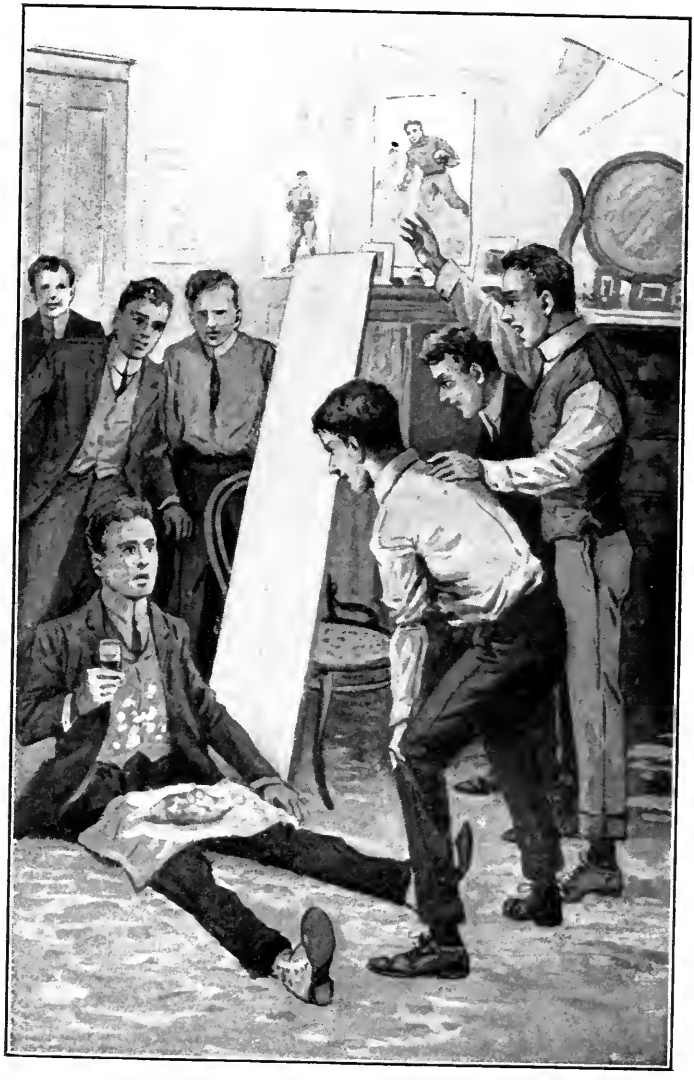
"Why, this is perfectly lovely," lisped William Philander Tubbs, as he sat on the end of the board-seat, his lap covered with a paper napkin on which rested a large plate of chicken salad and some sandwiches. In one hand he held an extra large glass of grape juice.

"Everybody ready!" announced Stanley, with a wink at several of the boys. "Here is where we drink to the health of Tom Rover!"

"Tom Rover!" was the exclamation, and at a certain sign all the boys seated on the board except William Philander leaped to their feet.

The result was as might have been expected. The dudish pupil had been resting on the end of the board, which overlapped the chair, and with the weight of the others removed, the board suddenly tipped upward and down went William Philander in a heap, the chicken salad jouncing forward over his shirt front and the glass of grape juice in his hand being dashed full into his face.

"Hi! Hi! What—er—did—er—you do that for?" he spluttered, as he sat on the floor, completely dazed. "Say! why didn't you tell me you were going to get up?" and then he started



THE BOARD SUDDENLY TIPPED AND DOWN WENT WILLIAM PHILANDER. *Page* 106.

The Rover Boys on a Tour.

to wipe the grape juice from his eyes and nose.

"Hello! Salad's going down!" cried one student gaily.

"Say, Tubbs, there is no use of throwing such nice food as that away even if you don't want it," chimed in another.

"Don't you know enough to stand up when a toast is to be drunk?" queried a third.

"I—I—didn't quite understand," stammered William Philander, and then with an effort he extracted himself from the mess on his lap and slowly arose to his feet. "My gracious! I believe I have utterly ruined this vest and trousers!" he added mournfully, as he gazed down at the light gray suit he wore.

"Oh, a little gasoline will fix that up all right," said Spud. "Don't let a little thing like that interfere with your pleasure, Tubbs. Come on—here's another glass of grape juice. No use of crying over spilt milk—I mean juice," corrected the youth.

"Tom Rover! Everybody up!" came the call, and then amid a subdued murmuring of good luck the boys stood around Tom and drank his health.

"Thank you, fellows, very much," answered Tom, and there was just a suspicion of huskiness in his voice.

"Speech! Speech! Give us a speech!" came from several.

"Speech? Great guns! I never made a speech in my life," announced Tom, and now for the first time he looked a bit confused.

"Oh, you've got to say something, Tom," cried Stanley.

"What shall I talk about—earthquakes in India, or the spots on Tubbs' pants?" queried Tom, with a grin.

"Never mind what you talk about so long as you say something," came from Bob.

"All right then—here goes!" announced Tom after a little pause. "Catch this before it's too late. I'm glad to be here, otherwise I wouldn't be here. I'm glad you are here, otherwise you wouldn't be here. I think Brill College is the best college any fellow could ever go to, if that hadn't been so I'd never have gone to Brill. I'm sorry I couldn't stay here to graduate, but I've left the honor to Sam here, and I trust he'll get through and make a record for the whole family. Boys, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. And here's wishing you all success at graduation and success through life," and thus concluding his little speech, Tom took a generous drink of ginger ale, while the others applauded vigorously.

"Very good!" cried Sam, but then added quickly: "For gracious sake! don't make too much noise or you'll have one of the monitors here and we'll get some black marks."

"That's right, fellows," announced Stanley. "After this we'll have to be as noisy as a mouse in a cheese factory."

"Now that I have been called on to make a speech," announced Tom, after quietness had been restored, "I am going to call on Songbird for one of his choice bits of poetry."

"Oh, now, Tom! please don't do that," pleaded the would-be poet of Brill. "You know I'm in no humor for writing poetry now."

"All the more reason why you should write some," announced Sam. "Come on now. You must have something tucked away in your system —I mean something brand new."

"Well—er—I've got something new, but I hardly think it is appropriate for this occasion," answered Songbird slowly.

"Never mind; give it to us no matter what it is," cried one of the students.

"Let her flutter!"

"Poetry for mine!"

"Let her flow, Songbird!"

"That's right. Turn on the poetry spigot,

Songbird;" and thus urged the would-be poet of Brill began:

"The world is black and I feel blue,
I do not know what I'm to do,
That fellow hit me in the head
And left me in the road for dead.
I go around from hour to hour
And I am feeling mighty sour.
I am consumed with helpless woe——"

"Because I lost that heard-earned dough,"

completed Tom, rather suddenly, and this abrupt ending caused a general laugh.

CHAPTER XI

TOM FREES HIS MIND

THE party in Number 25 did not break up until some time after midnight, and all present declared that they had had the time of their lives. Only one interruption had come, made by a good-natured monitor who had begged them to make less noise, and this fellow, well known to Tom, had been bought off with several sandwiches and a bottle of ginger ale.

"And how do you fellows feel this morning?" asked Tom, who was the first to get up after a sound sleep.

"Oh, I'm first rate," announced his younger brother. "I thought I'd dream, with so much chicken salad and sandwiches and cake in me, but I slept like a log."

"I didn't sleep extra well," came slowly from Songbird. "But I don't think it was the feast kept me awake."

Tom walked over to where the would-be poet of Brill sat on the edge of a cot and dropped down beside him.

"Songbird, you take the loss of that money too much to heart," he said kindly. "Of course we all know it was a great loss. Yet it won't do to grieve over it too much. And besides, there is hope that some day the authorities will catch that Blackie Crowden and get at least part of the money back."

"It isn't the money alone, Tom; it is the way Mr. Sanderson has treated me. And besides that, I'm worried over that mortgage. I'd like to know just what old Grisley and his lawyer are going to do."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Songbird. If you wish me to, I'll call on Mr. Sanderson and tell him what we are willing to do, so that he can rest easy about paying the mortgage off if he has to."

"I wish you would go, Tom—and put in a good word for me, too," cried Songbird, eagerly.

"Oh, I'll do that, never fear. I'll go this morning before I start back to New York;" and thus it was arranged.

"You said that you had something to tell me, Tom," remarked Sam, as the three were going downstairs to breakfast. "What was it?"

"Oh, it may not amount to much, Sam. I'll tell you about it as soon as we can get by ourselves," answered Tom.

The morning meal was quickly disposed of, and then Tom and Sam returned to Number 25, the former to repack his dress-suit case before leaving for the Sandersons' place and for New York.

"I don't exactly know how to get at this, Sam," began his brother, slowly, when the pair were in the bedroom and the door had been closed. "It is about Grace and the Walthams."

"About Grace?" and Sam showed his increased interest. "What about her?"

"Well, as I mentioned last night, this Ada Waltham is very rich, and she has a brother, Chester, who is older than she is and much richer. In fact, I've heard it said that he is a young millionaire."

"Well?" queried Sam, as his brother paused.

"Oh, I really don't know how to get at this, Sam," burst out Tom, and his face showed his worry. "Maybe there is nothing in it at all; but just the same I thought I had better bring it to you at once. I knew you would rather have it come from me than from some outsider."

"But what in the world are you talking about, Tom?"

"I'm talking about the attentions this Chester Waltham is bestowing upon Grace. It seems

that his sister, Ada, introduced him to Grace a couple of months ago, and since that time I've heard that he has been up to Hope several times, ostensibly to call on his sister, but really to see Grace. I understand he has taken both of them out riding several times."

"Taken Grace out riding!" cried Sam, and his face flushed suddenly. "Are you sure of this? Grace never mentioned it to me."

"I think it's the truth, Sam. You see, ever since Nellie left Hope she has kept corresponding with several of the girls there, and one of these girls knows Ada Waltham quite well, and she mentioned the fact of the sister and Grace going out with Chester. She said that she quite envied Grace being invited to ride out with a young millionaire. Then Nellie spoke to Dora about it, and Dora said she had heard practically the same thing from another one of the seminary students. Now I don't like to butt in, Sam, but at the same time I thought you ought to know just how things were going."

"I don't understand it at all," returned the younger brother, and for the moment he looked rather helpless. "If Grace received an invitation to go out with this Chester Waltham, I am quite sure she would mention it to me."

"Perhaps she merely went as a companion of

Ada's," suggested Tom, "and she might have thought it wasn't necessary to mention it."

"Have you heard anything more than that, Tom?"

"Not much, except that in one of the letters this girl said that she would envy Grace all the nice flowers and boxes of candy she might expect from such a wealthy young man as Waltham. Now, as I said before, Sam, it's none of my business, but I just couldn't help coming out here to put a flea in your ear. We—Nellie and I—know just how you feel about Grace, and both of us would like nothing better than to have you double up with her after you graduate."

"Thank you, Tom; it's fine for you to talk that way, and it's fine to have Nellie on my side. But I don't understand this at all. If Grace has been going out with this Chester Waltham, why hasn't she said something to me about it? She has spoken to me about Ada a number of times, but I never heard this Chester mentioned once."

"Well, I can't tell you any more than I have told you," returned Tom. "If I were you, I'd see Grace and find out just what this fellow has been doing. You know a fellow who is worth a million dollars is some catch for any girl."

"Yes, I know. It's a good deal more than I'll be able to offer Grace."

"True, but money isn't everything in this life, Sam. I didn't look for money when I married Nellie, and I don't think she cared a rap how much I was worth."

"That's the way it ought to be done——"

"I always supposed that you and Grace had some sort of an understanding between you," went on Tom, after rather an awkward pause. "Of course, Sam, you haven't got to say a word about it if you don't want to," he added hastily.

"We did have some sort of an understanding, Tom. But you know how it was with you and Nellie—Mrs. Laning wouldn't think of your becoming publicly engaged until after you had left college. She has told Grace that she will have to wait. So she is free to do as she chooses."

There was but little more that could be said on the subject, and so Tom turned to pack his suit case while Sam got ready to attend one of his classes. The youngest Rover heaved a heavy sigh, which showed that he was more disturbed than he cared to admit.

A little while later Tom had said good-bye to his brother and to his numerous friends at Brill and was on his way in a hired turnout to the Sanderson homestead, which he had promised to visit before leaving on the train at Ashton for New York City. Tom went on his errand

alone, none of the others being able to get away from the college that morning.

The Sandersons had heard nothing about his arrival at Brill and, consequently, were much surprised when he drove up. Minnie greeted him with a warm smile, and even Mr. Sanderson, considering his great loss, was quite cordial.

"Ain't comin' back to complete your eddication, are you, Mr. Rover?" questioned the farmer, with a slight show of humor.

"No, Mr. Sanderson. I'm through with Brill so far as studying goes," answered the youth. "I just took a run-out to see how Sam and the others were getting along. They told me all about your loss, and I'm mighty sorry that the thing happened. Poor Songbird is all broke up over it."

"Humph! I reckon he ain't half as much broke up as I am," retorted the farmer. "This has placed me in a fine pickle."

"Now, Pa, please don't get excited again," pleaded Minnie, whose face showed that she had suffered as much, or more, as had her parent.

"Ain't no use to get excited now. The money is gone, and I suppose that is the last of it. What I'm worryin' about is how I'm goin' to settle about that mortgage. Grisley at first said he would put it off, but yesterday he sent word that

he was comin' here to-day with his lawyer to settle things."

"And here they come now!" interrupted Minnie, as she glanced out of a window. The others looked and saw two men drive up the lane in a cutter. They were old Henry Grisley, the man who held the mortgage on the farm, and Belright Fogg. The girl went to the door to let the visitors in. Old Henry Grisley paid scant attention to Tom when the two were introduced to each other. The lawyer looked at the visitor in some astonishment.

"Huh! I didn't expect to see you here, Mr. Rover," said Belright Fogg, coolly. "Are you mixed up in this unfortunate affair?"

"I may be before we get through," answered Tom.

"You weren't the young man who lost the money?"

"No."

"I've got an account to settle with your brother," went on Belright Fogg, rather maliciously. "He took great pleasure the other day in hitting me in the head with a snowball, almost knocking me senseless. I've had to have my head treated by a doctor, and more than likely I'll sue him for damages."

"I reckon you'll do what you can to make it

hot for him," returned Tom. "It's your way, Mr. Fogg. But just let me give you a word of advice—you take care that you don't get your fingers burnt."

"Ha! Is that a threat?"

"Oh, no. It is only a word of advice. Please to remember that we know all about you, and we won't stand any nonsense from you. If my brother really hurt you, he'll be willing to do the fair thing; but if you think you can gouge him in any way, you've got another guess coming."

"Looky!" came in a shrill voice from old Henry Grisley. "I thought we come here fer my money on that er mortgage," and from under a pair of heavy gray eyebrows he looked searchingly into the faces of Mr. Sanderson and the lawyer.

"Yes, Mr. Grisley, that's what we came for," returned Belright Fogg, "and the sooner we come to business perhaps the better."

"As I've told you before, the money is gone—stolen," said Mr. Sanderson. "I can't pay—at least not now, and I'd like an extension of time."

"Mr. Grisley isn't inclined to grant any extension," said Belright Fogg, somewhat pompously. "The mortgage is too big for this place

anyway, and he feels that he ought to have his money."

"And if Mr. Sanderson can't pay, what then?" questioned Tom, before the farmer could speak.

'Why, we'll have to foreclose and sell the place," answered the lawyer, quickly.

"That's it! That's it!" came shrilly from old Henry Grisley. "I want my money—every cent of it. If I don't git it, I'm goin' to take the farm," he added in tones which were almost triumphant.

"But see here——" began Mr. Sanderson.

"Oh, Pa, don't let them sell the farm!" burst out Minnie, and as she spoke the tears started to her eyes.

"You won't sell the farm, Mr. Grisley," said Tom, coolly.

"Why not, if the money isn't paid?" cried the old man.

"The money will be paid—every cent of it," answered Tom.

CHAPTER XII

OLD GRISLEY COMES TO TERMS

All in the room looked at Tom in some surprise because of the plain way in which he had spoken.

"Mr. Rover, you are sure of what you are saying?" questioned Mr. Sanderson, quickly, in a low voice.

"Yes, Mr. Sanderson, we'll take care of this mortgage. Don't you worry a bit about it."

"Did you say you would pay off this mortgage?" demanded Belright Fogg, glaring at Tom.

"I didn't say I'd pay it off personally. But my folks will take care of it."

"The money is due now—has been due for several days."

"Yes, sir, that's right!" came shrilly from Henry Grisley. "And I want you to know that I want the full amount with interest up to the day when it is paid. I ain't goin' to lose nothin' —not a cent."

"Mr. Grisley, I have an offer to make to

you," went on Tom, addressing himself directly to the old man and utterly ignoring Belright Fogg. "You don't know me, but let me say that my father and my uncle are worth a good deal of money. I am in business in New York with my father, and our concern has a great deal of money to invest. Now, if you will agree to hold this mortgage for thirty days, I will guarantee to have it paid in full at that time with every cent of interest. And in addition to that I will pay you twenty-five dollars for your trouble and for your lawyer's fees."

"Ha! What do you think I am? What do you think I work for?" demanded Belright Fogg, with a scowl. "My fee will be more than twenty-five dollars in this case."

"What? What?" shrilled Henry Grisley, turning his beadlike eyes on the lawyer. "Twenty-five dollars? Not much! I'll give ye ten dollars and not a cent more."

"That's the way to talk, Mr. Grisley. You give him ten dollars and you keep the fifteen dollars for your own trouble," cried Tom. "So far as I can see he hasn't done anything for you excepting to come here to see Mr. Sanderson, and certainly such a trip as this isn't worth more than ten dollars."

"My services are worth a good deal more!"

exclaimed Belright Fogg. And thereupon ensued a war of words between him and Henry Grisley which lasted the best part of a quarter of an hour. The lawyer saw the case slipping away from him, and at last in deep disgust he said he would have no more to do with the affair.

"Don't want ye to! Don't want ye to!" piped out Henry Grisley. "Lawyers are a useless expense anyway. I'll settle this case myself, and for what you've done I won't pay more'n ten dollars, jest remember it!" and he shook a long, bony finger in Belright Fogg's face.

"I won't be insulted in this manner!" cried the lawyer, and then in a dudgeon he stormed from the house, leaped into the cutter, and drove away.

"A good riddance to him," murmured Mr. Sanderson. But then he added hastily: "Was that your horse, Grisley?"

"No, it wasn't," was the answer. "And how I'm to git home now, I don't know," added the old man, helplessly.

"Where do you live?" questioned Tom.

"The other side of Ashton, on the Millbury road."

"All right, then, I'll take you there when I go down to the depot," answered Tom. "That is, if you want to ride with me."

"I want to know jest how we stand on this mortgage question first," announced Henry Grisley. "I want your offer down in black and white."

"You shall have it, and the others can be witnesses to it," answered Tom, and in the course of the next quarter of an hour a paper was drawn up and duly signed by which Tom agreed that the mortgage should be taken over by the Rovers within the next thirty days, with all back interest paid, and that Henry Grisley should be paid a bonus of twenty-five dollars for his trouble and for his lawyer's fees. To bind the bargain Tom handed the old man a ten-dollar bill on account, which Henry Grisley stowed away in a leather wallet with great satisfaction.

"Oh, Tom! it's just splendid of you to help us out in this manner!" said Minnie, after the transaction had been concluded and while old Grisley and Mr. Sanderson were talking together.

"I'm glad to be of service to you," answered the youth. "I only hope for your sake, and for the sake of Songbird, that the money that was stolen is recovered. Songbird is going to get on the trail of that rascal if it is possible to do so."

"I hope they do locate that fellow, Tom. If

they don't I'm afraid pa will never forgive poor John."

"Oh, don't say that, Minnie. 'Never' is such a long word it should not have been put in the dictionary," and Tom smiled grimly.

Now that he felt fairly certain that he was to get his money, Henry Grisley was in much better humor.

"I suppose I might as well have left that mortgage as it was," he mumbled. "It was payin' pretty good interest."

"Well, that was for you to decide, Grisley," returned Mr. Sanderson. "Personally I don't see how you are going to make any better investment in these times."

"Well, I've got thirty days in which to make up my mind, ain't I?" queried the old man. "If I don't want to close out the mortgage I ain't got to, have I?"

"Certainly you've got to sell out, now that you have bargained to do so," put in Tom. "You can't expect us to pull our money out of another investment to put it into this one and then not get it."

"Hum! I didn't think o' that," mused old Grisley. He thought hard for a moment, pursing up his lips and twisting his beadlike eyes first one way and then another. "Supposin' I

was to say right now that I'd keep the mortgage? What would you do about it?"

"Do you really mean it, Grisley?" asked Mr. Sanderson, anxiously.

"Depends on what this young man says, Sanderson. One thing is sure; I ain't goin' to give up that ten dollars he give me—and Fogg is got to be paid somehow."

"Look here! if you want to keep the mortgage just say so," declared Tom. "It's a good mortgage and pays good interest. You can't invest your money around here to any better advantage."

"All right, then, I'll keep the mortgage," announced Henry Grisley. "But understand, young man, I'm to keep that ten dollars you give me too," he added shrewdly.

"Well, I don't see——" began Tom, when Mr. Sanderson interrupted him.

"All right, Grisley, you keep the ten dollars, and you settle with Fogg," announced the farmer. "And it's understood that you are to make out the mortgage for at least one year longer."

"Can't ye give me more'n the ten dollars?" asked Henry Grisley. "Mebbe I might have to pay Fogg more'n that."

"Don't you pay him a cent more," said Tom. "His services aren't worth it."

"I won't pay him nothin' if I can git out of it," responded the old man, shrewdly. "If I keep the mortgage, then what has he done for me? Nothin'. Mebbe I'll give him half of the ten dollars. I've had jest as much trouble as he has."

Following this discussion the paper formerly drawn up was destroyed and a note written out and signed by Henry Grisley, in which the old man agreed to renew the mortgage for one year from the date on which it had been due.

"To tell ye the truth, I wouldn't have bothered about this," explained old Grisley, in a burst of confidence; "but, you see, Fogg knew the mortgage was due and he come to me and asked me what I was goin' to do about it. And then when word come that your money had been stolen, he told me that I'd better foreclose or otherwise I might git next to nothin'."

"The underhanded rascal!" was Mr. Sanderson's comment.

"That's just what he is," answered Tom. "You know we had a lot of trouble with him last year—and evidently we are not done with him yet," he added, as he thought of what Belright Fogg had said concerning the snowball thrown by Sam.

Tom wanted to say a good word for Song-

bird, and the opportunity came when, a few minutes later, and before their departure, Minnie invited them to partake of some cake and hot coffee. While Grisley sat down in the dining-room, the youth talked to the farmer.

"Now, Mr. Sanderson, I have done what I could for you," he said, coming at once to the point; "and now I want to say a word or two about poor Songbird. He feels awfully bad over this matter, and he thinks that you are doing him an injustice. And let me say I think so too," and Tom looked the farmer squarely in the eyes as he spoke.

"Yes, I know, Rover, but——"

"Now, Mr. Sanderson, supposing you had been in Songbird's place and had been knocked down and nearly killed; what would you say if you were treated as you are treating him? Wouldn't you be apt to think that it was a pretty mean piece of business?"

At these plain words the farmer flushed and for the instant some angry words came to his lips. But then he checked himself and turned his eyes away.

"Maybe you are right, and maybe I was a bit hasty with the lad," he said hesitatingly. "But you see I was all worked up. It took me a good many years to save that four thousand

dollars, and now that I am getting old it won't be no easy matter for me to save that amount over again."

"You won't have to save it over again, Mr. Sanderson. Songbird insists upon it that just as soon as he gets to work he's going to pay you back dollar for dollar."

"Did he tell you that?"

"He did. And he told the others the same thing. He'll make that loss up to you if it takes him ten years to do it. I've known him for a good many years now. We went to Putnam Hall Military Academy together before we came to Brill—and I know he is a fellow who always keeps his word. He's one of the best friends we Rover boys have. He's a little bit off on the subject of poetry, but otherwise he's just as smart and sensible and true-blue as they make 'em," went on Tom, enthusiastically. "And not only that, he comes from a very nice family. They are not rich, but neither are they poor, and they are good people to know and be connected with," and Tom looked at the farmer knowingly.

"I see, Rover." Mr. Sanderson drew a deep breath, and then looked through the doorway to where Minnie was pouring out the coffee. "If I was too hasty I—I—am sorry."

"And you will let Songbird come here and call on your daughter?"

"I—I suppose so, if Minnie wants him to come."

"Thank you, Mr. Sanderson. I am sure you won't regret your kindness," said Tom, and insisted upon grasping the farmer's hand and shaking it warmly. Then he went in to have some cake and coffee before taking his departure with old Grisley.

"So you are going back to New York, are you, Tom?" said the girl while he was being served.

"Yes, I am going to take the train this afternoon," he answered, and then continued: "I've got a loose button here on my coat, Minnie. Will you fasten it before I go?"

"Sure I will," she returned, and a few minutes later led the way to a corner of the sitting-room, where was located a sewing basket.

"I wasn't worrying much about losing the button, Minnie," he whispered. "I wanted to tell you about Songbird. I have just spoken to your father about him, and he says he can come to see you the same as he used to."

"Oh, Tom! did he really say that?" and Minnie's eyes brightened greatly.

"Yes, he did. And as soon as I get to Ashton

I am going to send Songbird a telephone message to that effect," returned Tom.

"Oh, Tom! will you?" and she looked at him pleadingly.

"Surest thing you know, Minnie. And believe me, Songbird, when he gets that news, will be the happiest fellow in Brill."

"I don't think he'll be any happier than I'll be," answered the girl; and then of a sudden blushed deeply and finished sewing on the button without another word.

Ten minutes later Tom bade the Sandersons good-bye, and, accompanied by Henry Grisley, drove away in the direction of Ashton. Old Grisley was left at his home, and then Tom took himself to the depot, where, from a telephone booth, he sent a message to Songbird telling the would-be poet of Brill how it had come about that Grisley had agreed to renew the mortgage for one year, and how Mr. Sanderson had said that Songbird could renew his calls upon Minnie if he so desired.

"Tom, you're a wonder!" said Songbird over the telephone, "you're a wonder, that's all I can say!"

"Never mind what I am," returned the fun-loving Rover, kindly; "you just see if you can get on the trail of that fellow who stole the

four thousand dollars, and at the same time you get busy and make up for lost time with Minnie. Good-bye!" and then he hung up the receiver, and a few minutes later was on board the train bound for the metropolis.

CHAPTER XIII

SAM ON THE ROAD

THE next few days were very busy ones for Sam because he had a number of important classes to attend, and he was hard at work finishing his theme on "Civilization in Ancient Central America." It was impossible to call on Grace, and so he did nothing to find out the truth about Chester Waltham because he did not wish to ask the girl about this over the telephone, nor did he see his way clear to expressing his thoughts on paper.

Sunday came and went, and Monday morning brought a letter to the youngest Rover which he read with much interest. It was from Belright Fogg, a long-winded and formal communication, in which the lawyer stated that he had been under medical treatment because of being hit in the head by a snowball thrown by Sam, and he demanded fifty dollars damages. If the same was not paid immediately, he stated that he would begin suit.

"Anything wrong, Sam?" questioned Songbird, who was present while Sam was reading the letter. "You look pretty serious."

"Read it for yourself, Songbird," was the reply, and Sam passed the communication over.

"Well, of all the gall!" burst out the would-be poet of Brill. "Fifty dollars! Of course you won't pay any such bill as this?"

"Not so you can notice it," returned Sam, sharply. "If he had sent me a bill for five dollars or less I might have let him have the money just to shut him up. But fifty dollars! Why, it's preposterous!"

"What do you propose to do?"

"I won't do anything just yet. I want time to think it over and to talk it over with some of the others and, maybe, with Dr. Wallington."

When they heard of this demand for money from the rascally lawyer, Stanley and Spud were as angry as the others.

"I don't believe he's entitled to a cent," came from Stanley. "We were having that snowballing contest on the college grounds, and while the highway runs through that end of the grounds, I believe Fogg passed through there at his own peril, as a lawyer might put it. If I were you, Sam, I'd put the whole case up to Dr. Wallington, and I'd remind the doctor of your

former trouble with Fogg, and let him know just what sort of an underhanded rascal he is."

"All right, Stanley, I'll do it," answered Sam. "I'll go to the doctor immediately after classes this afternoon. Will you go along?"

"Of course, if you want me to."

Four o'clock found them at the door of the doctor's study. He looked at them rather curiously as they entered.

"Well, young men, what can I do for you?" he questioned pleasantly.

"I've got into some trouble over that snowballing contest," answered Sam; and, sitting down, he gave the head of Brill the particulars of the occurrence, and then produced the letter received from Belright Fogg.

"Hum!" mused the worthy doctor, as he knitted his eyebrows. He must have been pretty badly hurt."

"I don't think he was hurt at all, Doctor," interrupted Stanley. "I was present, and so were a number of the other students. Mr. Fogg had his hat knocked off, and that was about all. He wasn't stunned or anything like that. He talked to Sam just as rationally as I am talking to you, and all those standing around heard him. Of course, he was very angry, not only because he had been hit but because the fellow who had

thrown the snowball was Sam Rover. He, of course, remembered how the Rovers foiled his plot to do them out of what was coming to them when their flying machine was wrecked on the railroad, and also how they got the best of Fogg and a company of brokers in New York City."

"Yes, yes, I remember about the wrecked flying machine," returned Dr. Wallington. "I know nothing about this affair in New York."

"Well, it was a very serious matter, and Fogg came pretty close to going to prison," answered Sam, and gave a few details, as already related in the volume entitled "The Rover Boys in New York."

"Very interesting, Rover, very interesting indeed," murmured the head of Brill. "But even that did not excuse your hitting this man in the head with a snowball and hurting him."

"There is another point I would like to mention," said Stanley. "We were having the contest on the college grounds, and Mr. Fogg was struck on the roadway where it runs through our grounds."

"Ah! I see. That might make a difference. The highway is more or less of a public one, it is true, but it has never been turned over to the county authorities, so it really forms a part of our grounds still. But of one thing I wish

to be sure, Rover—did you aim at Mr. Fogg, or was the snowballing unintentional?"

"I didn't see him at all," answered Sam. "Some of the fellows rushed behind the bushes and I simply let drive along with a number of others. Then Fogg appeared and claimed that I had hit him in the head. I rather think he tells the truth, although I am not positive."

"In that case he would have to prove that you were guilty. Besides that, if it came to a matter of law, he would have to prove actual damages, and I do not see how he could claim fifty dollars if he was not hurt more than you say. If you wish, you can leave the whole matter in my hands and I will have it investigated."

"Thank you very much, Doctor Wallington," returned Sam, warmly. "This lifts a load off my mind. Of course I will pay whatever you settle on;" and so the matter was allowed to rest.

A thaw had set in and the snow began to disappear rapidly from the roads and fields around Brill. There was a good deal of slush, which rendered some of the highways almost impassable, so that it was not until a week later that Sam had an opportunity to visit Hope. In the meantime, however, he had sent a nice little note to Grace in which no mention was made of the

Walthams. He had looked for an answer but none had come.

"Where bound, Sam?" questioned Songbird, when he saw his roommate getting ready to use his automobile.

"I'm going for a run to Hope. Do you want to come along?" and Sam's eye had a twinkle in it.

"You might run me around to the Sanderson place. It won't take long in the auto," returned the would-be poet. "If I can get there, I won't mind walking back this evening. I've been wanting to go for a long while, but the roads have been so poor I couldn't make it."

"All right, Songbird, come ahead," was Sam's answer; and a little later found the pair on the road.

It did not take long to reach the Sanderson farm, and as they entered the lane Sam tooted his horn loudly.

"I've brought you a visitor, Minnie!" cried the Rover boy, as he brought the machine to a standstill. "Here is somebody I know you won't want to see, but I'm going to leave him here nevertheless," and he grinned broadly.

"Oh, John!" burst out the farmer's daughter, and blushed deeply. She came forward and shook hands with both youths. "I am more than glad to see you."

"I am on my way to Hope, so I won't come in," went on Sam. "How is everything, Minnie?"

"Oh, about as usual," answered the girl, and then went on: "Of course you know all about what Tom did for us? It was splendid!"

"You haven't heard anything more regarding the money?"

"Not a thing, Sam. I thought maybe you had something to tell," and the girl turned from Sam to Songbird.

"We have sent out the photographs and the description of Blackie Crowden," answered the latter. "They are going to the police in all the large cities, so if Crowden turns up at all he'll be arrested sooner or later."

After a few more words Sam left the Sanderson place and headed directly for Hope.

Although he would not admit it even to himself, the youngest Rover was a good deal worried. What Tom had told him concerning Grace and the Walthams had been continually in his mind, and time and again he had wondered how he should broach the subject to Grace and what the answer of the girl would be.

"Of course she's got a right to go out with whom she pleases," he told himself. "But still I thought—well I thought it was all fixed between us, that's all."

Sam was so occupied with his thoughts that he paid scant attention to the running of the automobile. As a consequence he went over a number of sharp stones, and a minute later there came a loud report from the rear of the machine.

"A blowout! Confound the luck!" he exclaimed, as he brought the automobile to a standstill. "And just when I was in a hurry to get to Hope!"

There was nothing else to do, so, stripping himself of his overcoat and donning a jumper, Sam got out, taking with him some of the tools from under the automobile seat. It was a tire on one of the rear wheels which had blown out, and this wheel he now jacked up for the purpose of putting on a new shoe and inner tube. As luck would have it, the tire that had been cut fit very tightly, so that it was all the Rover boy could do to get it off the rim. He tugged and twisted, perspiring freely, but it was some time before he could even get the injured shoe started.

"If I can't get it off, what ever am I to do?" he mused. "I must be at least half a mile from even a telephone, and the nearest garage is at Ashton. At this rate I'll never get to Hope."

He continued to work over the tire, at last doing his best to pound it off with a bit of iron

and a hammer. Then he gave a final wrench, which brought the tire off so suddenly that Sam was sent flat on his back in the dirt and slush of the road. It was an occurrence to try anybody's patience, and Sam arose in anything but a happy frame of mind. His back was covered with mud, and a good deal of the slushy water had penetrated to his skin.

"Ugh! of all the rank luck!" he muttered, as he shook himself. "If I ever get this wheel mended I'll be a fine sight to present myself at a fashionable ladies' seminary. Why in the world didn't I look where I was driving, instead of rushing right over such a prime collection of rough stones?"

But finding fault with himself did not mend matters, and so, casting the cut tire aside, Sam unstrapped one of the extra shoes he carried and got out another inner tube.

As if everything was to go wrong that afternoon, the new shoe proved to be as small as that which had been taken off, and as a consequence Sam had to work like a Trojan for the best part of half an hour before he finally got it into place.

"And now I've got to pump it up by hand," he observed to himself, grimly, as he remembered that the power pump which had been installed

on the engine was out of order and could not be used. Then he brought out the hand pump and set to work to fill the new tire with air.

Sam had the tire about three-quarters pumped up and was working away as vigorously as his somewhat exhausted condition would permit when he heard a honking of an automobile horn, and the next moment a machine came in sight around a turn of the highway. The car was a large and powerful one of foreign make, and was driven by a young man stylishly dressed, in a full suit of furs, and wearing automobile goggles. Behind him were two young ladies, also wearing furs, and with veils covering their faces.

"Tough luck!" sang out the young man at the wheel of the passing car, and he waved one hand pleasantly towards Sam.

The youth had been bending over the hand pump, but now, as the other automobile swept by, he straightened up suddenly and stared with open eyes after the vanishing turnout. He had not recognized the young man who was running the machine, but he had recognized the two young ladies in the tonneau of the car.

"Ada Waltham! And that was Grace with her!" he murmured. "And if that's so, it must have been Chester Waltham who was running the car!"

CHAPTER XIV

DAYS OF WAITING

As SAM gazed after the vanishing automobile a pang of bitterness swept through his heart. He remembered all that his brother had told him concerning Chester Waltham, and he also remembered that Grace had never mentioned the young millionaire.

"And she knew I was coming over to Hope just as soon as the roads made it safe and pleasant for automobiling," he murmured to himself.

Neither of the young ladies in the tonneau of the car had looked back, so it was more than likely they had not recognized him as he was bending over the hand pump, inflating the new tire.

"But maybe she saw me after all and did not want to let on," he thought dismally. "Maybe she thought I wouldn't recognize her."

What to do next was a problem for the young collegian. If Grace was not at the seminary he had no desire to call there. He continued to

work over the tire, and soon it was properly inflated, and he put away the tools he had used. His face was a study, for he was doing some hard thinking.

"Well, I'll go to Hope anyway, and if she isn't there I'll leave my card, so she'll know I called. Then I'll see what she has to say about matters," he told himself; and setting his teeth somewhat grimly he started up the automobile and continued his trip.

At the door of the seminary he was met by a maid, who brought him the information that Miss Laning was out. Then several girls who knew Sam came up, and one of them explained that Grace had gone automobiling.

"She went with Ada Waltham and her brother, Chester," explained the girl student. "You see, Chester has a brand new foreign car—a beauty—and he was very anxious to give his sister and Grace a ride. We thought he might have asked some of us to go along, but he didn't," and the girl pouted slightly.

"You don't suppose they were going to stop at Brill?" questioned Sam, struck by a sudden thought.

"I don't think so, Mr. Rover. Ada said something about riding to Columbia and having dinner there this evening. That, you know, is quite

a distance, and the road doesn't run past your college."

"Then I suppose they won't be back till late?"

"They had permission to stay out until ten o'clock," put in another of the girls who were present.

"Oh! I see." As the girls were looking at him rather sharply, Sam felt his face begin to burn. "Well, I hope they have a good time," he added somewhat hastily. "Good-evening," and then turned and walked quickly towards his automobile; and in a minute more was on his way back to Brill.

"I'll wager Grace Laning has got herself into hot water," was the comment of one of the girls, as they watched Sam's departure. "I don't believe he likes it one bit that she went off with the Walthams."

"Humph! You can't expect a girl to hang back when she is asked to take a ride in a brand new automobile, and with such millionaires as Chester Waltham and his sister," broke in another girl. "I just wish I had the chance," she added rather enviously.

In the meantime, Sam was driving along the country road in rather a reckless fashion. His mind was in a turmoil, and to think clearly just then seemed to be out of the question.

"Of course she has a right to go out and dine with the Walthams if she wants to," he told himself. "But at the same time——" And then there came up in his mind a hundred reasons why Grace should have refused the invitation and waited for him to call upon her.

"Hello! you are back early," remarked Spud, when Sam appeared at Brill. "I thought you were going to make an evening of it."

"I had some bad luck on the road," replied Sam, rather sheepishly. "I had a blowout, and in trying to get the tire off I slipped and went flat on my back in the mud and slush," he continued.

"Is that so? Well, that's too bad, Sam. So you came home to get cleaned up, eh? I thought your girl thought so much of you that she wouldn't care if you called even when you were mussed up," and at this little joke Spud passed on, much to the Rover boy's relief.

The only occupant of Number 25 who seemed to be happy that night was Songbird, who came in whistling gaily.

"Had a fine time with Minnie," he declared—"best time I ever had in my life. I tell you, Sam, she's a wonderful girl."

"So she is, Songbird."

"Of course, you don't think she's half as won-

derful as Grace," went on the would-be poet of Brill; "but, then, that's to be expected."

"How did Mr. Sanderson treat you?" broke in Sam, hastily, to shift the subject.

"Oh, he treated me better than he did before." Songbird's face sobered for a minute. "To be sure he feels dreadfully sore over the loss of that four thousand dollars. But I assured him that I and the authorities were doing all in our power to get the money back, and I also assured him that if it wasn't recovered I expected to pay it back just as soon as I could earn it. Of course he thinks I am talking through my hat about earning such a big amount, but just the same I am going to do it just as soon as I graduate from Brill. I'd go to work to-morrow instead of staying here if it wasn't that I had promised my folks that I would graduate from Brill, and as near the top of my class as I could get. If I left now, my mother would be heartbroken."

"Of course your folks know about the loss, Songbird?"

"Yes. I wrote them the whole particulars just as soon as I could, and I've let them know what we are doing now."

"Do they blame you for the loss?"

"My father thinks I might have been a little

more careful, but my mother says she thinks it is Mr. Sanderson's fault that he let me get such an amount of money in cash and carry it on such a lonely road. But dad is all right, and in his last letter he said he could let Mr. Sanderson have a thousand dollars if that would help matters out."

"Had Mr. Sanderson heard any more from old Grisley, or Belright Fogg?"

"Yes. He saw Grisley and the old man said the lawyer was boiling mad because he had agreed to let the mortgage run for another year. Fogg wouldn't accept the five dollars that old Grisley offered him for his trouble, so then Grisley would give him nothing; and there the matter stands."

"He'll get something out of Grisley if he possibly can. My opinion is, since Fogg lost his job with the railroad company, and made such a fizzle of his doings in New York City, he is in bad shape financially and eager to get his hands on some money in any old way possible."

"Have you settled the snowball affair with him yet?"

"No. I'm going to see Dr. Wallington about it to-morrow," answered Sam.

The Rover boy had rather expected some sort of a communication from Grace the next day,

and he was keenly disappointed when no letter came and when she failed to call him up on the telephone. Several times he felt on the point of calling her up, but each time set his teeth hard and put it off.

"It's up to her to say something—not me," he told himself. "She must know how I feel over the affair."

When Sam called upon Dr. Wallington, the head of Brill met him with rather an amused smile.

"I suppose you want to see me in regard to that claim of Mr. Fogg's," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I have had one of the professors call on the lawyer and bind him down to just exactly what happened and how badly he was hurt. It seems that he did not go to any doctor at all, although he did see a friend of his, a Doctor Slamper, on the street."

"Doctor Slamper!" cried Sam. "Oh, I remember him. He's the fellow who came here with Mr. Fogg at the time we put in our claim for damages on account of the wrecked biplane."

"Ah, indeed! I remember," and Dr. Wallington nodded knowingly.

"And what does Mr. Fogg want us to do?" questioned Sam.

"At first, as you know, he wanted fifty dollars. Then he came down to twenty-five, and at last to fifteen. Then we brought to his attention the fact that the snowballing contest had taken place on the college grounds, and that it was his own fault that he had become mixed up in the affair. This brought on quite an argument, but in the end Mr. Fogg agreed to accept six dollars, which he said would pay for three consultations with Dr. Slamper at two dollars per consultation," and the good doctor smiled rather grimly.

"And did you pay the six dollars, Doctor?"

"Not yet, Rover. I expected, however, to send him a check for that amount to-morrow, provided you are satisfied."

"I think I'll have to be, Dr. Wallington. I suppose it's rather a cheap way out of the difficulty, although as a matter of fact I don't believe he is entitled to a cent."

"You may be right, Rover. But six dollars, I take it, is not so very large a price to pay for so much fun—I mean, of course, the fun of the snowballing contest in which, so they tell me, you were the one to capture the banners of the opposition."

"You're right, sir. And I'm satisfied, and you can place the amount on my bill," answered

Sam; and then he bowed himself out of the doctor's office.

Another day passed, and still there came no word to Sam from Hope. He was very much worried, but did his best not to show it.

"Call for all baseball candidates at the gym to-morrow afternoon!" announced Bob, during the lunch hour.

"I don't think I want to go in for baseball this spring," returned Sam.

"I heard something of that from some of the other fellows, Sam," interrupted Bob. "It won't do. We need you and we are bound to have you."

The roads were now drying up rapidly, and that afternoon Spud asked Sam if he did not want to walk to Ashton.

"I've got a few things I want to get at the stores," said Spud. "Come along, the hike on the road will do you good."

"All right, Spud, I'll go along, for I am tired of writing themes and studying," answered Sam. But it was not his theme and his lessons that worried the boy. Thinking about Grace, and waiting continually for some sort of word from her, had given him not only a heart ache but a headache as well.

When the boys arrived at Ashton they sep-

arated for a short while, Spud to get fitted with a new pair of shoes while Sam went to another place in quest of a new cap. The Rover boy had just made his purchase, and was leaving the store to rejoin Spud when he heard some one call his name, and looking around saw Andy Royce approaching.

"I just thought I'd ask you if you had heard anything about that Blackie Crowden yet," remarked the gardener from Hope, as he approached.

"Not yet, Royce. But they have sent out a good description of him, along with copies of his photograph, so the authorities think they will get him sooner or later."

"I've heard something that maybe you would like to know," went on Andy Royce. "I've heard that Crowden was over at Leadenfield, to a small roadhouse kept by a man named Bissette, a Frenchman."

"When was this?" demanded Sam, with interest.

"Either the day of the assault or the day after. Bissette didn't seem to know exactly. I happened to be there buying some potatoes for the seminary—you see Bissette is a kind of agent for some farmers of that neighborhood. I mentioned the robbery to him and spoke about the

suspicion about Crowden, and he was very much surprised. He said Crowden was there for a couple of hours using the telephone, and then he left the place when somebody drove up in a cutter."

"Do you mean that Crowden went off with the other person in the cutter?"

"Bissette thinks so, although he ain't sure, because as soon as Crowden went out, Bissette turned to do some work inside and forgot all about him."

"Did Bissette have any idea who the man in the cutter was?"

"He wasn't sure about that either, but he kind of thought it was a lawyer who used to work for the railroad company—a man named Fogg."

CHAPTER XV

BASEBALL TALK

"Fogg!" cried Sam, in astonishment. "Do you mean Belright Fogg?"

"That's the man—the fellow who used to do the legal work for the railroad here."

"Was this Bissette sure it was Fogg?"

"No, he wasn't sure, because he didn't pay very much attention. But he said if it wasn't this Fogg, it was some one who looked very much like him," answered Andy Royce.

This was all he could tell Sam of importance, and the Rover boy went off, to rejoin his chum in a very thoughtful mood.

"That's rather a queer state of affairs," was Spud's comment, when told of the matter. "If Fogg met this Blackie Crowden, what do you suppose it was for?"

"I haven't the least idea, Spud."

"Do you think he was mixed up in this robbery?"

"No, I can't say that. The assault was com-

mitted by one man, and so far they haven't been able to find any accomplices."

When Sam returned to Brill he at once sought out Songbird and told him of what he had heard. The would-be poet of Brill was even more surprised than Spud had been.

"I wouldn't put it above Belright Fogg to be in with a rascal like Blackie Crowden," was Songbird's comment. "He did his best against you in that flying machine affair and in that affair in New York City."

"I've got an idea," said Sam, after a slight pause. "I am to pay him six dollars' damages for hitting him in the head with that snowball. Doctor Wallington was going to send him a check. I've got a good notion to ask the doctor to let me pay the bill and get Fogg's receipt for it. That will give me a chance to pump him about this matter."

"Do it, Sam! And I'll go along," burst out his chum, quickly. "If this Belright Fogg knows Blackie Crowden I want to know it."

Permission was readily granted by the head of Brill to Sam to pay the bill, and that evening the Rover boy and Songbird took the former's automobile and rode over to where Belright Fogg boarded, on the outskirts of Ashton. They found the lawyer just preparing to go out, and

he showed that he was very much surprised to see them.

"I suppose you are here to pay that bill you owe me," he said stiffly to Sam.

"I am, Mr. Fogg," was the answer. "I believe you agreed to accept six dollars. If you will make out a receipt for the amount I will give you Doctor Wallington's check."

"Humph! isn't the check receipt enough?" demanded the lawyer.

"Perhaps. But I would prefer to have a receipt showing exactly what the money is being paid for," answered Sam. "As a lawyer you must know it is best to have these things straight."

"Oh, very well. Come in and I'll write out your receipt for you," announced Belright Fogg, coldly, and ushered the pair into a sitting-room.

Sam had asked Songbird to say nothing about Blackie Crowden until the matter of the snowball injury was settled. A receipt for the money was quickly penned by Belright Fogg.

"There, I presume that will be satisfactory," he said, as he showed it to Sam.

"That's all right, Mr. Fogg," was the answer. "And here is your check." Sam paused for a moment while the lawyer looked the check over. "By the way, Mr. Fogg, I understand you were

in Leadenfield a few days ago at the tavern kept by Bissette."

"What's that?" shot out the lawyer, somewhat startled.

"I said that I understood that you were in Leadenfield a few days ago at the tavern kept by Bissette."

"And that you met a man there named Blackie Crowden," broke in Songbird, quickly.

"I—I was in Leadenfield some days ago on business," answered Belright Fogg, hesitatingly, "but I wasn't at the Bissette place, or anywhere near it."

"But you met a man named Blackie Crowden?" queried Sam.

The lawyer glared at the Rover boy and also at Songbird.

"Blackie Crowden? I don't know such an individual—at least, not by name."

"He is a fellow who used to work in Hoover's livery stable in Center Haven—a man who stutters greatly."

"Don't know the fellow," was the prompt response.

"You mean to say you didn't meet Blackie Crowden at Bissette's?" cried Songbird.

"Look here, young man, what are you driving at?" stormed Belright Fogg, in a sudden temper.

"You've no right to question me in this manner. What is it all about?"

"We have it on good authority that you met this man, Blackie Crowden, outside of Bissette's place," answered Sam, stoutly.

"Who is this man you mention?"

"Being a lawyer and interested in public affairs, you ought to know that, Mr. Fogg," answered Songbird. "He is the man who, we think, knocked me down and robbed me of Mr. Sanderson's four thousand dollars."

"Ah! I—I remember now. And so you are trying to connect me up with that rascal, are you? What do you mean by that?"

"Never mind what we mean," declared the would-be poet of Brill, stoutly. "I want to get at the facts in this matter. If you say you didn't meet Crowden, all right, we'll let it go at that. But there are others who say you did meet him."

"It's false—absolutely false!" roared Fogg, but as he spoke his face paled greatly. "I—I don't know this fellow, Crowden—never met him in my life. This is all a put-up job on your part to make trouble for me," and he glared savagely at both Songbird and Sam.

"It's no put-up job, Mr. Fogg. We intend to get at the bottom of this sooner or later," an-

swered Sam, as calmly as he could. "Come on, Songbird."

"See here! you're not going to leave this house until I know just what you are driving at," roared the lawyer. "I won't have you besmirching my fair name!"

"Your fair name!" returned Sam, sarcastically. "There is no necessity for you to talk that way, Mr. Fogg. I know you thoroughly. If you want to rake up the past you can do it, but I advise you not to do so."

"I—I——" began the lawyer, and then stopped, not knowing how to proceed.

"We might as well go," broke in Songbird. "But perhaps, Mr. Fogg, you haven't heard the end of this," added the would-be poet of Brill; and though the lawyer continued to storm and argue, the two chums left the house and were soon on the return to Brill.

"I'm afraid we didn't gain anything by that move," was Sam's comment, as they rode along. "He'll be on his guard now, and that will make it harder than ever to connect him with this affair—provided he really is mixed up in it."

"He acted pretty startled when we put it up to him," returned Songbird. He heaved a deep sigh. "Well, maybe some day this matter will be cleared up, but it doesn't look like it now."

Several days passed, and Sam stuck to his lessons as hard as ever. Once or twice he thought of calling up Grace at Hope or of writing her a note, but each time he put it off, why, he could not exactly explain even to himself. But then came a rift in the clouds and the sun shone as brightly as ever. A note came from Grace, which he read with much satisfaction. A part of the communication ran as follows:

"I was thinking all manner of mean things about you because you did not answer my note of last week, when—what do you think? The note came back to me, brought in by one of the smaller girls here, Jessie Brown. Jessie was going to town that day, and I gave her the note to post and she put it in the pocket of her coat, along with several other letters, so she says. Well, the pocket had a hole in it, and, as you might know, my own particular letter had to slip through that hole into the lining of the coat. The rest of the letters were mailed, but my letter remained in the lining until this morning, when Jessie came to me with tears in her eyes to tell of what had happened. I felt pretty angry over it, but glad to know that you were not guilty of having received the note and then not answering it.

"In the note I told you how sorry I was to find that you had called here while I was away. You see, Ada Waltham's brother, Chester, came on in his new automobile—a big foreign affair, very splendid. He wanted to give Ada a ride, and invited me to go along, so I went, and we had a very nice time. Chester is an expert auto driver, and the way we flew along over the roads was certainly marvelous. He insisted upon it that we dine with him. And, oh, Sam! such a spread as it was!

"You know he is a millionaire in his own right (Ada has a great lot of money too). We certainly had one grand time, and I shall never forget it. He got a beautiful bouquet for the table, and also bouquets for Ada and me to take home, along with boxes of the most beautiful chocolates I ever ate. But just the same, I am awfully sorry I wasn't at the seminary when you called, and I don't understand why you haven't been up since, or why you didn't telephone to me.

"One of the girls here says they are organizing the Brill baseball nine for the coming season, and that they want you to play as you did last year. If you do join the nine, I hope you have the same success or more. And you can rest assured that I will be on the grandstand to offer

you all the encouragement possible. I hope that Dick and Tom come on to see the game and bring Dora and Nellie along, and then we can have the nicest kind of a jolly party. Ada Waltham, as you may know, loves baseball games too, and she says that she is going to have Chester here at that time to take her over to Brill, unless somebody else turns up to accompany her."

"All right, as far as it goes," mused Sam, on reading this note. "But I wish Chester Waltham would stay away. Of course I can't blame Grace for liking a ride in a big, foreign car and being invited out to such a first-class spread as she mentions, but, just the same, I wish she wouldn't go with him."

However, the communication brightened his thoughts considerably, and it was only a little while later when he talked to the girl over the telephone and made an arrangement for a ride in the automobile on the following Saturday afternoon, Songbird and Minnie to accompany them.

The four went off to Center Haven, where Sam spread himself on a dinner which was certainly all that could be desired. Grace was in one of her most winning moods, and when the

young couple parted the cloud that had hovered over them seemed to be completely dispelled.

As winter waned and the grass on the campus took on a greener hue, baseball matters came once more to the fore at Brill. Bob Grimes, who played at shortstop, was again the captain of the team, and it was generally understood that Spud Jackson would again occupy the position of catcher.

"We're going to miss Tom Rover a good deal this year," said Bob to some of the others. During the year past Tom had been the candidate for head twirler against both Bill Harney and Dare Phelps and had shown that he was the superior of both of the others.

"Well, you haven't got Tom Rover, so you've got to make the best of it," answered Stanley. "Phelps has been doing pretty well, I understand, so you might as well give him a chance."

"Yes, I thought I'd do that," answered the team captain. "Harney isn't in it at all, and doesn't want even to try. I'll give Phelps a chance and also Jack Dudley." Dudley was a sophomore whose swift pitching had become the general talk of the college. He, however, was rather erratic, and liable to go to pieces in a crisis.

As my old readers know, Sam had joined the

team the year before only after considerable coaxing, and then merely as a substitute. During the middle of the great game he had been assigned to left field in place of a player who had twisted his foot. In that position he had caught a fly in a thoroughly marvelous manner, and he had also managed, when at the bat, to bring in a home run.

"We've simply got to have you on the team, Sam," said the captain, a little later, when he caught the Rover boy in one of the corridors. "Your hanging back this year is rather hurting our chances of winning."

"But, Bob, I want to pay attention to my lessons," pleaded Sam. "I can't afford to get behind."

"You'll not get behind," was the answer. "Aren't we all striving to graduate? You ought to be willing to do as much as Spud and myself."

"All right, then, Bob, if you are going to put it that way," was the answer, and thereupon Sam allowed his name to go on the list of prospective players and at once began training.

After that matters moved along swiftly. The committee from Brill met with the committee from Roxley and arrangements were perfected for the coming game. As the contest had taken place the year previous at Roxley, it was, of

course, decided that the game this year should be played at Brill. Then men were set at work to place the diamond in the best possible shape for the contest, and the grandstand was repaired, and a new set of bleachers put up to accommodate a larger crowd than ever.

"This is a baseball year," announced Bob Grimes, "so we can expect a big rush of visitors." The nine had already won three games of minor importance.

"They tell me Roxley has got the best team it ever put in the field," announced Stanley one day, after he had been over to the other institution. "They've got three dandy pitchers, and two outfielders who are crackerjacks at batting. One of their men told me that they expected to walk all over us."

"Well, we'll see about that," returned Bob Grimes. "We've got a good team of our own, and I know every one of us will try to play his head off to win."

CHAPTER XVI

THE OPENING OF THE BALL GAME

The day for the great baseball game between Brill and Roxley dawned clear and bright. Sam had received word that both of his brothers with their wives would be on, reaching Ashton early in the morning. He drove down to the depot in his automobile to meet the newcomers.

When the train rolled into the station Dick Rover, as tall and handsome as ever, was the first to alight, quickly followed by his wife, Dora. Then came Tom and Nellie.

"Hello, Sam, my boy!" exclaimed Dick, as he strode up and shook hands, quickly followed by his wife. "How are you these days? But it is needless to ask, for you look the picture of health."

"Oh, I'm feeling fine," answered Sam, smiling broadly.

"Ready to play winning baseball, I presume," came from Dora, as she gave him a warm smile.

"Surest thing you know, Dora," he answered. "Oh, we've got to win from Roxley to-day!"

"Yes, but you haven't got me to pitch for you to-day, Sam," broke in Tom, as he came up and shook hands. "Who is going to do the twirling for Brill?"

"They are going to try Dare Phelps first, and if he can't make it, they will try Jack Dudley, one of the sophs."

"Oh, yes, I remember Dudley when he was a freshman," answered Tom. "Pretty clever fellow, too."

"How is it you didn't bring Grace with you, Sam?" questioned Nellie, as she took his hand.

"I'm to take you two girls up to Hope after I leave Tom and Dick at Brill," explained the youngest Rover. "Then we are to get all of you girls directly after lunch. Grace wanted it that way."

"My! but this is a touch of old times," remarked Dick, as he climbed into the automobile. "Let me take the wheel, Sam."

"Certainly, if you want to," was the quick reply, and a few minutes later, with the oldest Rover running the machine, the whole party set off for Brill.

"How are matters going in New York, Dick?" questioned Sam, while they rode along.

"We are doing quite well, Sam. Of course, we are having a little difficulty in certain di-

rections, but that is to be expected. You must remember in Wall Street the rivalries are very keen. I suppose some of our competitors would like to put us out of business."

"What about that tour Tom mentioned?"

"I think we can make it, Sam. I'll know more about it a little later. There is no hurry, you know, because you've got to graduate first," and Dick smiled knowingly at his brother.

Songbird and some of the other collegians were waiting to welcome Dick and Tom, and as soon as they had left the automobile Sam continued on the way to Hope.

"Oh! I'm so glad to see you!" cried Grace, as she rushed out and kissed her sister and her cousin. "Come right in. We are going to have a special lunch in your honor. Sam, I'm sorry I can't invite you, but you know what the rules are."

"Never mind. Tom will be on hand at one-thirty promptly," answered the youth. "I hope you'll all be ready, for we can't delay, you know."

"We'll be ready, don't fear," answered Grace.

When Sam returned to Brill he found a crowd of the seniors surrounding his brothers, telling them of the many things that had happened in and around the college since they had left.

"It's a jolly shame we can't have you in the box to-day, Tom," said Bob Grimes. "I'm afraid we'll need you sorely," he added rather anxiously.

"Why don't you put William Philander Tubbs in?" suggested Tom, with a grin. "Don't you remember what a famous ball player he was?" And then there was a general laugh, at the recollection of a joke that had once been played on the dudish college student.

The air was filled with talk of the coming game, and but scant attention was paid to the lunch provided for the collegians and their guests. As soon as the meal was over, Tom took the Rover's automobile and started for Hope to bring Grace and the others. When he arrived there he found his wife, Dora and Grace talking to Ada Waltham and her brother Chester, to whom he was introduced.

"We are going over to the game," announced Chester Waltham. "Ada and I are going to take half a dozen of the young ladies."

"Fine!" returned Tom. "The more the merrier! Don't forget to tell the girls to whoop her up for Brill."

"I think the most of them will do that," said Ada Waltham; "although one or two of them are Roxley sympathizers."

"Well, Brill can't have everything its own

way," answered Tom. A few minutes later he was on the return with Grace, Nellie and Dora.

When he arrived he found Sam awaiting them, and all walked down to the grandstand, where seats had been provided for the party. Grace and the others had just been made comfortable when Chester Waltham arrived with his sister and a number of others. The young millionaire came forward with a broad smile and was quickly introduced, and he lost no time in seating his sister next to Grace, while he sat directly behind the pair, with all the other girls he had brought close by. This arrangement did not altogether suit Sam, and he hurried off to the dressing-room to get into his baseball uniform in rather a doubtful frame of mind.

A little later there was a grand shouting at the entrance to the field, and into sight came a large automobile truck containing a drum and fife corps and carrying a large Roxley banner. The truck was followed by a dozen or more automobiles containing the Roxley team and their fellow-students. The students had tin horns and wooden rattles.

"Zip! Hurrah! Roxley!" was the cry, and then followed a great noise from the horns and rattles.

"Brill! Brill! Brill!" was the counter cry, and

then the furious din was taken up by the other side.

After that the grandstand filled up rapidly and so did the bleachers, until there was not an available seat remaining. In the meanwhile, a parking place for automobiles and carriages at the far end of the field was also well patronized.

"Some crowd, and no mistake!" was Stanley's comment, as he looked at the masses of humanity waving flags and banners and tooting their horns and using various other devices for making noise. "This is by far the biggest crowd we have ever had."

"Roxley has sent word all around that they are going to bury us this year," returned another student standing by. "They claim they have a team that can't be beaten."

Down in the dressing-room Bob was giving some final instructions to his men.

"I want you to play from the word 'go,'" he said. "Sometimes a game is lost or won in the first inning. Don't let them get any kind of a lead if you can possibly help it."

It had been decided almost at the last minute that instead of covering left field Sam should cover third base. There was a big cheer for the Roxley team when it made its appearance on the field, and another cheer when the Brill

nine showed itself. Then came the toss-up, and it was decided that Brill should go to the bat first.

The first man to the bat was a tall fellow who played center field, and as he came forward many of the Brill sympathizers cheered him lustily.

"Now show 'em what you can do!"

"Knock it over the back fence!"

The ball came in and the batter swung for it and missed it.

"Strike one!"

"That's the way to do it, Muggs!"

Again the ball came in, and this time there was a foul tip.

"Foul! Strike two!"

Following this second strike came two balls, over which the Brill contingent cheered. Then came a swift inshoot, which the batter missed by the fraction of an inch.

"Strike three! Batter out!" sang out the umpire.

"That's the way to do it, Muggs!" came the yell from the Roxley cohorts, and there followed a din of horns and rattles.

The second man up for Brill managed to get to first, but the next one went out on a pop fly, and then the man on first was caught trying to steal to second.

"That's the way to do it, Roxley! Keep it up!" And as a goose egg was put up for Brill on the score board the opponents cheered as wildly as ever.

But if Roxley had hoped to score in that first inning, her expectations were doomed to disappointment. The first man up went out on a pop fly, the second on a foul, and although the third managed to reach second base on what should have really been a one-base hit, the fourth man up knocked an easy one to first which ended their hopes.

It was not until the second inning that Sam came to the bat. There were two men out when he grasped the ashen stick and took his stand beside the home plate. He had a strike and two balls called on him, and then sent a clean hit between first and second bases.

"Run, Sam, run!" yelled Dick.

"Leg it, old man, leg it!" added Tom, and the youngest Rover certainly did speed for first, arriving there just a second before the ball.

"Oh, if only he can get in!" cried Grace, clapping her hands.

"It's a long way around to home plate," put in Chester Waltham. "He's got to have help to do it."

A moment later the next man to the bat

knocked an easy fly to second and that ended the chances for Sam's scoring, and another goose egg went up for Brill on the score board.

In the end of the second inning Roxley was fortunate enough to open the play with a neat drive which brought the batter to second. Then came another one-base hit, and amid a wild yelling the runner from second slid in over the home plate.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! A run for Roxley!"

"That's the way to do it! Keep it up! Snow Brill under!"

Bob Grimes walked up to Dare Phelps, who was occupying the pitcher's box.

"Take it easy, Dare," he pleaded. "Don't let 'em rattle you."

"They are not going to rattle me," responded Dare Phelps, and pitched the next batter out in one-two-three order. In the meantime, however, the man on first managed to steal second. A moment later he tried to reach third. The pitcher threw the ball to Sam, who leaped up into the air and caught it, coming down on the runner while he was still a foot from the bag.

"Runner out!" cried the umpire, and Roxley's player arose rather crestfallen and limped off to the benches.

"That's the way to do it, Sam. Nab 'em every time!" cried Tom.

When the inning was ended Roxley had only the one run to its credit.

Brill came to the bat for the third time with a sort of do-or-die look on the faces of the players. It was plucky little Spud who started a batting streak, getting safely to first and followed by another player who managed to reach second, landing Spud on third. Then came two outs. Before the inning was ended, however, two runs were placed on the board to the credit of Brill.

"Two to one in favor of Brill!" cried one of the students.

"Just wait, this inning isn't over yet!" cried one of the Roxley sympathizers. Then Roxley went to the bat, and because of a bad fumble on the part of the Brill second baseman, they managed to secure another run.

"Two to two!" was the cry, as the figures went up on the big score board.

"Anybody's game, so far," said Dick Rover, soberly, "but I do hope Brill wins."

"And so do I," answered his brother Tom.

CHAPTER XVII

HOW THE GAME ENDED

In the fourth inning Brill did its best to get in another run. There were two one-base hits made, but these were followed by a strike-out and two pop flies, so the hits availed nothing.

"Such playing as that isn't helping us any," was Dick's remark in a low tone to Tom.

"Well, those first two men up managed to find the ball," returned Tom, hopefully.

But if Brill had not fared well in that inning, Roxley did no better, so far as bringing in runs were concerned. But the Roxley batters found Phelps quite easily, pounding out numerous fouls.

"The score is two to two," remarked Chester Waltham, when the Brill team came up to the bat in the fifth inning. In this, with one man out, Sam managed to send a neat drive directly past the Roxley shortstop. He gained first with ease, and then, taking a desperate chance, slid safely to second.

"Good work, Rover! Keep it up!" came from one of his chums.

"That won't do him any good. They can't bring it in," called out a Roxley sympathizer, and he proved to be a true prophet, for the inning came to an end with no additional runs, Sam getting no chance to advance beyond the second bag.

"Now, then, Phelps, keep cool," admonished Bob, when in the second half of the fifth inning the Brill pitcher passed the first batter on balls.

"All right, I'll do my best," answered Dare Phelps. "But I must confess my arm is beginning to hurt me," he added.

"Do you want to drop out?" questioned the captain, quickly.

"Oh, no, not until they hit me more than they have," responded the Brill pitcher, grimly.

There followed one out, but after that came some free hitting which brought in two runs.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" shouted the Roxley students.

"Two to four in favor of Roxley! That's the way to do it! Snow 'em under!"

"Steady, Phelps, steady," warned the Brill captain. But it was of no avail, and the only way Brill could bring that inning to a finish was by the clever work of two of the fielders in capturing two flies which looked as if they might be home runs.

When the board showed the score of 2 to 4 Roxley went wild once more, while the followers of Brill looked correspondingly glum.

"Maybe you had better give Jack Dudley a chance," suggested Bob to Dare Phelps, when the two walked into the benches.

"Oh, let me try it just once more!" pleaded the pitcher. "Anybody might have let in those two runs."

"All right, Phelps, I'll give you one more chance," answered Bob, somewhat sharply. "You know we don't want this game to go to Roxley if we can possibly help it."

In the sixth inning Brill scored another goose egg. Then Roxley came once more to the bat, and on the first ball pitched by Phelps scored a home run, amid a yelling and cheering that could be heard for a great distance.

"Whoop! That's the way to do it! Five to two in favor of Roxley!"

"Keep it up, boys! Snow 'em under! Snow 'em under!" And then the Roxley crowd began a song, the refrain of which was: "We're here to-day to bury them!"

The cheering was still at its height when Bob motioned to Jack Dudley, who had been warming up in a corner of the field, to come forward and take Dare Phelps' place. There was a cheer

from Brill for the new pitcher, while Phelps retired rather crestfallen.

"Now, then, Dudley, put 'em out in one-two-three order!" was the cry.

"We've killed off one pitcher; now kill off the next!" came the cry from the Roxleyites.

"Take it easy, Dudley," warned Bob. "Give 'em your inshoot and that new fadeaway."

"I'll give 'em all that is in me," returned Jack Dudley, with a determined look on his lean, and somewhat angular, face.

The first man up got two balls and two strikes. Then came a foul tip, followed by another strike.

"Strike three! Batter out!" called the umpire.

"Hurrah! That's the way to do it, Dudley!"

The next man managed to get to first, but then came two more outs, and the sixth inning came to a close with the score still standing, Brill 2—Roxley 5.

"That's some lead," remarked Chester Waltham. "Brill has got to get busy pretty quickly if it expects to win this game."

"Oh, we'll get there, don't you worry," answered Tom, quickly, and then he shouted: "Go to it, fellows; go to it! Lambast the life out of that leather!" and at this cry there was a general laugh.

The seventh inning proved a blank for both

teams. Brill, however, managed to reach second, while Roxley was pitched out in one-two-three order by Dudley.

"Well, Dudley held them down that time," remarked Dick Rover. "I hope he manages to keep the good work up."

"Yes, but a pitcher can't win a ball game alone," answered Chester Waltham. "You've got to have some good batters."

"Go to it, Brill! Go to it! This is your lucky inning!" yelled Tom, enthusiastically. "Get busy, everybody!"

In the eighth inning the first man up for Brill went out on a pop fly. But then came a fine hit that took the next player safely to second. Then Sam walked to the plate.

"That's the way to do it, Brill!"

"Now, Rover, hit it for all you are worth!"

It must be confessed that Sam felt a trifle nervous, so anxious was he to make some sort of a showing. He swung his ashen stick at the first ball pitched.

"Strike one!" came from the umpire.

"Take your time, Sam!" yelled Tom. "Make him give it to you where you want it!"

Whether Sam heard the cry or not it would be hard to say, but he let the next ball go by, and then repeated this action.

"Ball two!" called the umpire.

"Oh, say! That was all right!" grumbled the Roxley catcher. "What do you want?"

"Too far out," returned the umpire sharply, and then added: "Play ball!"

The next one was a straight drive, and Sam swung at it with all the strength and skill he possessed.

Crack! The ashen stick hit the leather, and the sphere went sailing far down into center field.

"Go it, Rover, go it!"

"Come on in, Orben!"

Paul Orben, who had been the player to reach second, was already streaking up to third, and by the time Sam reached first Paul was legging it for the home plate.

"Throw that ball up here! Throw that ball up!" yelled the second baseman to the center fielder, who was still chasing after the bouncing leather.

Then amid a cloud of dust Paul slid in over the home plate while Sam, having reached second, was legging it rapidly for third. Up came the ball from the field to second, and then to third, but before it got there the youngest Rover was safely clutching the bag.

"Whoop! Hurrah! That's the way to do it! One run in and another on the way."

"Keep it up, Brill! You've struck your winning streak!"

"Oh, dear! I do hope Sam can bring that run in!" came from Grace.

"It might have been a home run if he had only run a little faster," remarked Chester Waltham.

"Faster!" retorted Tom, quickly. "Why, he legged it like greased lightning! Most players would have gotten only two bags out of that hit."

Following this batting came another out, but then the next man up managed to reach first, and amid a wild cheering on the part of the Brillites, and a loud tooting of horns, Sam rushed over the home plate.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Another run!"

"That makes the score four to five!"

"Keep up the good work, Brill!"

But that was the end of the run getting for the time being. Then Roxley came to the bat, and amid the most intense feeling Jack Dudley managed to pitch out three men in succession and the score went up on the board: Brill 4—Roxley 5.

"Now, fellows, this is our last chance," said Bob, as the team came in for the ninth inning. "Remember, one run will tie the score and two

runs may win the game. Now every man up on the job."

The first batter for Brill in the ninth inning was plainly nervous. He let two good balls go by and thereby had two strikes called on him. Then he made a wild pass at the next ball, knocking a short foul which the first baseman for Roxley gathered in by a sensational running leap.

"One man gone! One man gone!" chanted the Roxley followers. "Now, then, get the other two."

"Take your time, boys, take your time," cried Bob. "Make them give you just what you want."

This advice was heeded, and as a result the next man got to first and on another one-base hit managed to reach third. Then came a one-bag drive that brought in a run and took the man on first to second.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! That ties the score!"

"Keep it up, Brill! Bring in all the runs you can!"

Following the bringing in of the tying run, there came some field play between the pitcher and the basemen, and as a result the man who had reached first was called out trying to steal second. In the mean time the other runner tried to steal home, but had to stay on third.

"Be careful, boys, be careful," pleaded Bob,

and then a few seconds later came another base hit which brought in another run.

"Good! Good! That's the way to do it, Brill!"

"That makes the score six to five in favor of Brill!"

"Bring in half a dozen more while you are at it!"

"Hold them down. Don't let them get another run," pleaded the captain of Roxley's nine to his men.

"We're going to make a dozen more," announced Tom Rover, gaily. But this was not to be, and a few minutes later the inning came to an end with the score standing: Brill 6—Roxley 5.

"Now, then, Roxley, one run to tie the score and two to win the game!" was the cry from the visitors.

"Lam out a couple of homers!"

"Show 'em where the back fence is!"

In that ninth inning Roxley came to the bat with a "do-or-die" look.

"Now watch yourself, Dudley," whispered Bob to the pitcher. "Don't let them rattle you."

"They are not going to rattle me," answered Dudley. Yet it was plainly to be seen that the sophomore was nervous, and that the strain of

the situation was beginning to tell upon him. Nevertheless, amid a wild cheering on the part of Brill, he struck out the first man up.

"That's the way to do it, Brill!"

"It's all over but the shouting!" shrieked one Brill sympathizer.

"Not much! Here is where we make half a dozen runs!" yelled a Roxleyite.

The next batter up was a notoriously hard hitter. Dudley was afraid to give him something easy, and as a consequence the pitcher had four balls called on him and the batter went to first. Then came a drive to center field which took the man on first to second, while the batter reached first with ease.

"That's the way to do it, Roxley! Now you've got 'em going!"

With only one man out and two men on bases, Jack Dudley was more nervous than ever. Yet Bob did not have the heart to take him out of the box, and, besides, he had no pitcher on hand who was any better.

"Hold 'em down, Dudley! Hold 'em down!" pleaded the captain. "Don't feed 'em any easy ones." And the pitcher nodded grimly, being too nervous to even answer.

A ball was called and then a strike. Then Dudley fed the batter a straight one. Crack!

The ashen stick met the sphere and sent it along just inside the third base line.

"Run! Everybody run!" was the yell from the Roxley contingent, and while the batter dropped his stick and sped toward first, the man on that bag legged it for second and the man on second rushed madly toward third.

For one brief instant it looked as if one, and possibly two, runs would be scored. But then, Sam, playing a little off third, made a wild leap into the air and pulled down the ball. Next, like a flash, he tagged the man sliding in toward the third bag.

"Batter out! Runner out!" announced the umpire.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Brill wins the game!"

"Say! that was a dandy catch by Rover, wasn't it?"

"Yes. And how neatly he put that runner out, too!"

And then as the score, Brill 6—Roxley 5, was placed on the big board a wild yelling, tooting of horns, and sounding of rattles rent the air. Once more Brill had vanquished its old opponent.

And everybody said that Sam Rover was the hero of the occasion.

SAM MADE A WILD LEAP INTO THE AIR AND PULLED DOWN THE BALL. *Page* 186.

The Rover Boys on a Tour.

CHAPTER XVIII

GOOD-BYE TO BRILL

THE celebration at Brill that evening was one long to be remembered. Bonfires blazed along the river front, and the students marched around them, and around the campus and the college buildings, singing songs and having a good time generally.

The others had insisted that the Rovers take part in these festivities, and so the boys had taken the girls to Hope, where Dora and Nellie were to remain until the next day.

"I must say I am mighty glad I came," said Dick to his brothers, as he surveyed the shouting and marching students. "This certainly takes me back to the days when I was here."

"I'm going in for some fun," announced Tom, and was soon in the midst of the activities. The students played jokes on William Philander Tubbs, old Filbury, and on a number of others, and the fun-loving Rover helped them all he could. An attempt was also made to get the

captured banners of the freshmen and sophomores from Sam's room, but this failed.

"The boys are rather noisy to-night," said one of the professors to Dr. Wallington.

"I agree with you, sir," returned the head of Brill, "but then they have something to be noisy about. Their victory was certainly well earned," and the doctor smiled indulgently.

Many had come forward to congratulate Sam on his fine work in putting through a double play unassisted in the last inning.

"It saved the day for Brill," announced Stanley, and many agreed with him.

The great game had taken place on Saturday afternoon, so, as the next day was Sunday, Sam could do as he pleased. The Rovers had an early breakfast, and then lost no time in riding over to the seminary, where they found the others waiting for them.

"Oh, Sam, your playing was simply wonderful!" declared Grace, as she beamed on him. "How you ever caught that fly in the last inning is beyond me."

"Yes, and what do you think?" put in Grace's sister. "Mr. Waltham said he thought it was quite an ordinary play—that any good, all-around player could have done what Sam did!"

"Maybe he was a bit jealous of Sam," was

Dora's comment, and as she spoke she looked rather keenly at Grace, who, of a sudden, blushed deeply.

"I suppose Waltham brought his sister and those girls back here last evening," said Sam.

"Oh, yes," answered Nellie, "and they insisted that we join them in a little treat. Mr. Waltham drove down to Ashton for some ice cream, fancy crackers and candy, and we had quite a spread under the trees. It certainly was very nice of him to do it."

"I suppose he's got so much money he doesn't know what to do with it," was Dick's comment.

"He was asking me about that tour that we propose taking this summer," said Dora. "He added that he and his sister and maybe others were going to take a tour in his new car, but he hadn't decided on where they were going, and he thought it might be rather jolly if he joined our touring party."

"Humph! I don't see——" began Sam, and then broke off suddenly.

"It would be lovely to have Ada along," said Grace. "She is a splendid girl, and we've become quite chummy since Nellie and Dora went away."

"Well, we haven't any time to settle about that tour just now," announced Dick. "Our train

leaves in a couple of hours and you girls have got to pack up before we start for the Ashton depot."

The mention of Chester Waltham, along with the fact that he might join them on their proposed automobile tour, put rather a damper on Sam's feelings. He acted very soberly, and his remarks to Grace were not half as cordial as they usually were. Evidently Sam's "nose was out of joint," although he was not willing to admit it, even to himself.

All drove down to the Ashton depot, and there Sam and Grace said good-bye to the others, who were going on to the home farm at Valley Brook and then to New York City. On the return to the seminary Sam had hoped to have a long talk and an understanding with Grace, but unfortunately two girls turned up who wished to get back to Hope, and there was nothing for the Rover boy to do but to invite them to ride along, so that the confidential talk between them had to be abandoned.

After the great ball game matters quieted down at Brill. All of the seniors were hard at work getting ready for the final examinations, which would start on the week following.

"If you make as good a showing in the examinations as you made on the ball field, you

sure will prove a winner," declared Bob to Sam one day.

"Well, I'm going to do my level best, Bob," was the reply. "You see, neither Dick nor Tom had a chance to graduate, so I've got to make a showing for the entire family."

During those days nothing further had been heard regarding Blackie Crowden or the missing money. Sam and Songbird had met Belright Fogg once on the streets of Ashton, but the lawyer had marched past without deigning to speak to them.

"He's a foxy customer," was the comment of the would-be poet of Brill. "If he had anything to do with Blackie Crowden, he'll try his level best to keep it to himself."

At last the examinations began. They were to continue for the best part of two weeks, and during that time Sam cut out all sports and confined himself to his studies with greater diligence than ever. He had several important papers to hand in, and he worked over these early and late, rewriting and polishing until there seemed to be absolutely nothing more that could be done. Songbird also was busy, for in addition to his studies and themes he had been asked by the class to write a poem in honor of the coming occasion.

"I only wish I could write something that would bring in some cash," remarked the would-be poet one afternoon.

Although he had not apprised Sam of that fact, Songbird had copied off several of his best poems and sent them to various publishers, hoping that they might prove acceptable and bring in some money which he might turn over to Mr. Sanderson as an evidence of what he hoped to do in the future. So far, however, he had not heard from any of the poems but one, which had been promptly returned.

At last came the day when the examinations ended. All the themes written by the students had been handed in, and Sam found himself free to do as he pleased. He at once sought Grace by means of the telephone, hoping to get her to take an automobile ride with him.

"I am sorry," she answered over the wire, "but I have still another examination to take and a theme to finish, so I don't dare to think of going out."

"How have you made out so far?" questioned the youth.

"I don't know, Sam. Sometimes I think I have done very well, and then again I am afraid that I missed a great many things. How did you make out?"

"Oh, I think I'll pass, but how high up I don't know. I am hoping for great things, but I may be mistaken." And there the conversation had to come to an abrupt end, for a professor came in to use the Brill telephone.

It must be confessed that Sam slept rather uneasily on the night before the morning on which the announcement concerning each student's standing was to be made.

"I'm scared to death," came from Spud. "I missed a whole lot of questions."

"So did I," put in Paul. "And I boned hard too," he added dismally.

Finally came the announcement. Out of a class of sixty-five seniors, sixty-two had passed. Sam's name was at the head of the list with a percentage of ninety-seven; Songbird came fourth with a percentage of ninety-three; Spud had ninety-one, and Stanley the same; while Paul, William Philander Tubbs and a number of others were listed at from eighty to eighty-eight per cent.

"Sam, allow me to congratulate you!" cried Songbird, as he came up to wring his friend's hand. "You certainly made a splendid showing."

"You made a pretty good showing yourself," answered Sam, his face beaming.

"Your folks will be mighty glad to hear of this," went on the would-be poet of Brill. "Why don't you telegraph to them?"

"Just what I'm going to do," answered the Rover boy. "And I'm going to telephone to Hope, too," he added.

"That's the talk. I wish I could telephone over to the Sandersons."

"Never mind, Songbird, I'll drive you over there when I drive to the seminary," replied Sam.

The days to follow were delightful ones for Sam. True to his promise, he took Songbird over to the Sanderson homestead and then visited Grace. The girl had passed third from the top of her class and was correspondingly delighted.

"We had such dreadfully hard questions I thought I should never get through," she confessed to the youth when they were alone. "And you came out on top, Sam. Oh, it's wonderful —simply wonderful!" and she caught both his hands.

"Well, I'm glad—glad for myself and glad for you, Grace," he answered, and looked her full in the eyes. She looked at him in return and blushed prettily.

"Oh, Mr. Rover, allow me to congratulate you," came from somebody near by, and Ada

Waltham came tripping up. "Grace told me all about your wonderful showing."

"Ada made a splendid showing herself," answered Grace, before Sam could speak.

"I was one point behind Grace," answered the rich girl, "and that certainly was wonderful for me. I never was very keen about studying—in fact, I didn't want to go to college, only I had to do it if I wanted to inherit the money that my uncle left me."

"Oh, Sam! and to think our days of studying are over at last!" burst out Grace. "I can scarcely believe it."

"I can't believe it myself, Grace," he answered. "It seems to me I've been going to school all my life. Just think of the years and years I put in at Putnam Hall Military Academy before I came to Brill!"

"Yes, and to think of the years I put in at the Cedarville school before I came to Hope," returned Grace. "Now it is all over I feel quite old," and she laughed merrily.

As was the usual custom, it had been decided that graduation exercises at Hope should take place two days before those at Brill, which would give ample opportunity for those desiring to do so to attend both functions.

"My folks are all coming to the graduations,"

announced Grace, a day or two after the conversation just recorded.

"Yes, and my folks will all be on hand," answered Sam. "Even Uncle Randolph and Aunt Martha are coming. Dear, old Aunt Martha!" he said. "She has been a regular mother to us boys ever since I can remember. I'm awfully glad she will be present, and I'll be mighty glad to have Uncle Randolph too, not to say anything about dear, old dad."

After that there seemed to be so much to do and so many things to think about that time sped with amazing swiftness. The Rovers and the Lanings had engaged rooms at the leading hotel in Ashton, and arrived on the day previous to the graduation exercises at Hope.

"Tell you what, education is a great thing!" remarked Mr. John Laning when speaking of the matter to Mr. Rover. "I didn't have much of a chance at it when I was a boy—I had to go out and scrap for a living—but I'm mighty glad that I had the means to give the girls the learning they've got."

"You're right—it is a great thing," answered Mr. Anderson Rover. "I am only sorry now that Dick and Tom didn't have the chance to graduate as well as Sam. But, you know, I was very sick and somebody had to look after our

business affairs. And what those boys have done for me is simply wonderful!"

"The greatest boys that ever lived," announced Randolph Rover. "They used to bother the life out of me with their fun and noise, but now that they have settled down and made men of themselves I forgive them for all the annoyances."

Sam's father had brought for him as a graduation present a very fine diamond scarf pin, while his uncle and aunt presented him with a handsomely engraved cardcase and Dick and the others brought him a ring set with a ruby. Grace's folks and the others had also brought several gifts of value for the girl, and to these Sam added a bracelet and the finest bouquet of flowers he could obtain in Ashton.

The graduation exercises at Hope were exceedingly pretty. All the girls were dressed in white, and they formed a beautiful picture as they stood in a long line to receive their diplomas. The onlookers clapped vigorously, but no one with more fervor than did Sam when Grace received her roll. The exercises were followed by a reception that evening at which the fair girl graduates shone as they never had before.

"And now for the big event at Brill!" said Dick, when on the way back to Ashton that even-

ing. "Sam, aren't you a bit sorry to leave the old college?"

"I certainly am, Dick. At the same time, now that you and Tom have buckled down to business, I feel that I ought to be doing likewise."

"Yes, but all of you young folks are going on that tour first," announced the boys' father. "I think you have earned it, and I want you to have it. I'll supply all the funds necessary, and I'll see to it that everything goes right at the office while you are away."

Never had Brill been so crowded as it was at those graduation exercises. Every seat in the college hall was occupied, and every doorway and open window held its group of eager onlookers. The Rover family had seats almost in the center of the auditorium, and all of the Lanings were with them.

"Oh, it's grand! just grand!" murmured Aunt Martha, as she saw Sam and the rest of the senior class gathering. "Oh! how proud I am of that boy!" and the tears coursed freely down her cheeks.

The valedictory address had been written by Sam and was delivered by the class orator, Stanley. This was followed by a class poem written by Songbird and delivered by a student named

Wells. Sam's valedictory was received with loud clapping of hands.

"A well written paper—very well written, indeed," was Dr. Wallington's comment, and a great number of visitors agreed with him. Songbird had worked hard over his class poem, which contained many allusions to local matters, and was received with many smiles and expressions of good humor.

"Songbird is certainly becoming something of a poet," was Dick's comment. "If he keeps on, some day he'll become the simon-pure article."

At last it was over, and Sam, with his sheepskin rolled up and tied with a ribbon, joined his folks. His father was the first to congratulate him, and then came old Aunt Martha, who wept freely as she embraced him.

"I'm proud of you, Sam, proud of you!" she said, in a voice trembling with emotion. "What a pity your own mother couldn't be here to see you! But the good Lord willed it otherwise, so we must be content."

"Sam, you've certainly done the family proud this day," announced his oldest brother. "To graduate at the top of the class is going some."

"Well, I've got to do something for the Rover name," said the happy youth, modestly.

There was another reception that night, and

again the bonfires blazed along the bank of the river. The undergraduates "cut loose" as usual, but those who were to leave Brill forever were a trifle sober.

"It's been a fine old college to go to," was Dick's comment.

"You're right there, Dick," came from Tom. "A fine place, indeed!"

"The best in the world!" answered Sam. He drew a deep breath. "No matter where I go in this old world of ours, I'll never forget my days at Brill."

CHAPTER XIX

GETTING READY FOR THE TOUR

"And now for the grand tour!"

"That's the talk, Sam! We ought to have the best time ever," returned his brother Tom.

"Just to think of such an outing makes me feel five years younger," came from Dick Rover. "I like work as well as any one, but a fellow has got to break away once in a while."

"And to think we are going away out to Colorado Springs and Pike's Peak!" burst out Dora.

"And all the way in our automobiles!" added Nellie. "I hope we don't have any breakdowns."

"So it's decided that we are to start Monday morning, is it?" asked Dick's wife.

"Yes, Dora, provided it is clear," answered Sam. "Of course there is no use of our starting our trip in a storm. We'll probably get enough rain while we are on the way."

"Look here, Sam, don't be a wet blanket!" cried Tom, catching his younger brother by the shoulder and whirling him around. "This trip

is going to be perfectly clear from end to end. I've ordered nothing but sunshine and moonlight," and at this remark there was a general laugh.

The young folks were assembled on the lawn in front of the old Rover homestead at Valley Brook. About two weeks had passed since Grace and Sam had graduated, and during that time the various arrangements for taking the tour to the West had been completed by the Rover boys. In the meantime, Fourth of July had been spent in Cedarville, at the Laning homestead, where all had had a glorious time.

"I'm awfully sorry that Songbird and Minnie can't go with us on this trip," remarked Dick, "but I know exactly how poor Songbird feels."

"Yes, he told me he felt he had to go to work," returned Sam. "He wants to do his best to earn that four thousand dollars."

"That's some job for a fellow just out of college to undertake," was Tom's comment. "What is he going to do for a living?"

"He has had a place offered to him by his uncle. He is to start at fifteen dollars a week, and he says his uncle will advance him as soon as he learns something about the business."

"They haven't heard any more about that

Blackie Crowden or the missing money?" questioned Nellie.

"Not a word. And it looks to me now as if they never would hear anything."

"More than likely that fellow has got out of the country," was Dick's comment. "Especially if he has learned that the police are after him."

"Oh, you can't tell about that," broke in Tom. "He may be hiding within a mile or two of where the crime was committed."

It had been decided that the touring party should take two automobiles—that belonging to the Rovers and a new machine which was the property of Mrs. Stanhope, Dora's widowed mother. The party was to consist of Dick and Tom and their wives, Sam and Grace and Mrs. Stanhope and Mrs. Laning. Uncle Randolph and Aunt Martha had also been invited to go along, but both had declined, stating that they preferred to remain on the farm.

"I have some important scientific data on farming to gather," had been Randolph Rover's explanation, "and, besides that, I must oversee the building of that new addition to the house;" for since the marriage of Dick and Tom it had been decided to build a large wing on the old homestead, so that the young folks might be accommodated there whenever they cared to make a visit.

Aleck Pop, the faithful old colored servant of the Rovers, was still at the farm, as was Jack Ness, the man of all work, and both did all they could to aid the boys and girls to get ready for the tour.

"It's most won'erful how you young gen'lemen has done growed up," was Aleck Pop's comment. "It don't seem no time at all sence you all was boys at Putnam Hall," and he grinned broadly, showing a mouthful of ivories.

"And to think two of 'em are married now and settled down!" added Jack Ness. "I can't hardly believe it. First thing you know we'll have a lot of young Rovers runnin' around this farm."

"Well, if they is any young Robers aroun' yere, I's gwine to serve 'em jest like I served the others," answered Aleck Pop, and then went off, nodding his head vigorously to himself.

The only drawback to the proposed tour, so far as Sam was concerned, was the fact that Chester Waltham and his sister Ada were going to accompany them as far as Colorado Springs. Then the Walthams proposed to continue to the Pacific Coast, while the Rovers were to return to the East.

"Are those two people going in a big touring car all by themselves?" questioned Sam, when he heard of this arrangement.

"They are not going to take the touring car, Sam," answered Grace. "Ada wrote me that her brother had purchased a new runabout—a very speedy and comfortable car—and they are going to use that instead."

"Humph! I don't see why they had to stick themselves in with our crowd," grumbled the youngest Rover. "Why didn't they take the trip by themselves?"

"Well, maybe I am to blame for that," answered Grace. "I told Ada all about our proposed trip, and said I was sorry that she couldn't go with us. You must remember she treated me very nicely while we were at the seminary, especially after Dora and Nellie left."

"Oh, I don't object to Ada," answered Sam. "Just the same, I think it would be nicer if we could go off by ourselves. Chester Waltham and his sister don't seem to fit in with us exactly."

"Well, I think Chester Waltham is a very nice young man, and certainly he has given me some splendid rides," answered Grace, and then walked off to join the others, leaving Sam to do some thinking which was not altogether agreeable.

The start was to be made from the farm, and the Walthams had written that they would be on hand early, stopping for the night at the hotel in Cornville, some miles away.

On the Friday before the Monday set for the start, all three of the Rover boys went down to New York City, to the offices of the newly formed Rover Company in Wall Street. They found their father in charge, and also several assistants, and everything seemed to be in good running order. Dick and Tom went over a number of business matters with their parent, and Mr. Rover declared that he could get along very well without the boys for at least a month or six weeks.

After the visit to the offices Dick and Tom took Sam up to their apartments on Riverside Drive, where they packed a number of things wanted by themselves and Dora and Nellie.

"Certainly a beautiful location," remarked Sam, as he walked to one of the front windows, to gaze out on the Hudson River.

"It certainly is a fine place, Sam," answered Tom, "and Nellie and I enjoy it just as much as Dick and Dora do." Tom looked at his younger brother questioningly. "I suppose now that you have graduated, Sam, you and Grace will be joining us here some day?"

"I don't know about that, Tom." Sam's face flushed painfully. "You see I—I——" and then he broke off, unable to proceed.

"You don't mean there is anything wrong between you and Grace, do you?" demanded the

brother, coming closer. Dick had gone to another room and so was out of hearing.

"I can't say that anything is wrong exactly, Tom," returned Sam, hesitatingly. "You see, I—I——"

"Is it that Chester Waltham?" demanded the other, quickly.

Sam nodded. "Of course I can't blame him, and I can't blame Grace, for the matter of that. It isn't every girl who gets the chance to marry a young millionaire."

"What! Has he proposed to her?" cried Tom.

"Oh, no, I don't think that, Tom. But he has been very friendly."

"Well, I wouldn't stand for it, Sam. I think Grace ought to marry you, and I would tell her so and have it settled."

"That's all well enough to say, Tom. But just the same I haven't any right to stand in her light. I haven't got any such money to offer her as this millionaire——"

"Rot! You've got enough money to make any girl comfortable, and that is all that is necessary. You go on in and win!" and Tom clapped his younger brother on the shoulder encouragingly. Then Dick entered, along with a maid left to take care of the apartments, and the talk came to an end.

While the boys were doing this, the girls had gone to Cedarville, and there assisted Mrs. Stanhope and Mrs. Laning in getting ready for the tour. Dora's mother had a hired chauffeur to run her car, and this man was to bring the party to Valley Brook in the Stanhope machine.

"I am very glad you are going, Mother," said Dora to her parent. "I am sure this trip will do you a world of good." For Mrs. Stanhope was not in the best of health and sometimes grew quite nervous when left too long to herself.

"It will be a wonderful trip, no doubt," answered the mother, "and I am sure I shall enjoy it greatly, especially with all you young folks along to brighten matters up."

"It will certainly be a wonderful tour for me," declared Mrs. Laning, who had always been more or less of a home body. "Gracious! Why, I can remember when I used to think a trip of ten or twenty miles on the steam cars was wonderful. Now just to think of our going hundreds and hundreds of miles in an automobile!"

"The most wonderful part of it to me is that we can afford to have you take such a trip as that, Mother," chuckled John Laning. "Sakes alive! when I was a young man the height of my ambition was to own about fifty acres free and clear, along with a couple of horses and half

a dozen cows. And now look at us—here we own over three hundred acres, got over fifty head of cattle, over two thousand chickens, and the finest orchards in this part of the state. I tell you we've got a lot to be thankful for," he added with great satisfaction.

"But I'll miss you, John, while I'm away," said his faithful wife.

"Don't you worry about me, Mother. I'd just as lief stay here and see all them big crops a-comin' in," announced the farmer. "That's fun enough for me. You go ahead with the young people and enjoy yourself. You've been in harness long enough and you deserve it."

Mr. Laning had had his ears wide open during the visit of his daughters and Dora, and before his wife and the others left for Valley Brook he called Mrs. Laning aside.

"What's this I hear about Grace going out with a young millionaire named Waltham?" he asked, curiously.

"I can't tell you much more than what you've already heard, John," she answered.

"I thought Grace had her eyes set on Sam Rover," went on the husband, looking sharply at his wife.

"That is what I thought myself. But it seems this young millionaire has been calling on his

sister at Hope, and he's been taking his sister and Grace out in his automobile and acting very nicely about it. Grace seems to be quite taken with him."

"Huh! A young millionaire, eh? Maybe he's only amusing himself with her. You had better caution her about him."

"No, John, I don't think that would do any good. In fact, it might do a great deal of harm," declared the wife. "Grace is old enough to know what she is doing."

"Yes, but if she has made some promises to Sam Rover——"

"I am not sure that she has made any promises. Sam has been very attentive to her,—but just because Tom married Nellie is no reason why Grace should marry Sam."

"Oh, I know that. But, somehow, I thought they had it all settled between 'em, and I certainly like Sam. He's a nice, clean-cut boy."

"Yes, I like Sam, too." Mrs. Laning heaved a deep sigh. "But, just the same, we had better not interfere. You know how it was when we got married," and she looked fondly at her husband.

"You bet I do!" he returned, and then put his arm over her shoulder and kissed her gently. "Well, let us hope it all comes out for the best," he added, and walked off to go to work.

CHAPTER XX

A MOMENT OF PERIL

"THIS is the life!"

"That's right, Tom. This kind of touring suits me to death," returned Sam Rover.

"Tom, how many miles an hour are you making?" broke in his wife. "Remember what you promised me—that you would keep within the limit of the law."

"And that is just what I am doing, Nellie," he answered. "But it's mighty hard to do it, believe me, when you are at the wheel of such a fine auto as this. Why, I could send her ahead twice as fast if I wanted to!"

"Don't you dare!" burst out Grace, who sat in the tonneau beside her sister. "If you do I'll make you let Sam drive."

"He's got to let me drive anyway after dinner," said the youngest Rover boy. "That's the arrangement."

It was the second day of the tour, and Valley Brook Farm, and in fact the whole central por-

tion of New York State, had been left far behind. The weather had turned out perfect, and so far they had encountered very little in the way of bad roads. Once they had had to make a detour of two miles on account of a new bridge being built, but otherwise they had forged straight ahead.

Tom and his wife, with Grace and Sam, occupied the first automobile, the remaining space in the roomy tonneau being taken up by various suitcases and other baggage. Behind this car came the one driven by Dick Rover. Beside him was his wife, with Mrs. Stanhope and Mrs. Laning behind them. Some distance to the rear was the third machine, a brand-new runabout, containing Chester Waltham and his sister Ada. Waltham had at first wished to take the lead, but had then dropped behind, stating he did not wish to get the others to follow him on any wrong road.

"You go ahead," he had said to the Rovers. "Then if you go wrong you will have only yourselves to blame."

"Well, we don't know any more about these roads than you do, Waltham," Dick had replied. "We are simply going by the guide book and the signs."

"I hate to use up my brains studying an auto-

mobile guide," Chester Waltham had returned with a yawn "When I am on an outing I like to take it just as easy as I possibly can."

"It's a wonder you didn't bring a paid chauffeur along," had been Sam's comment.

"I thought something of doing that, but my sister objected. She said if she was to go along I must run the car. You see, she wants me to risk my neck as well as her own," and the young millionaire had smiled grimly.

They had been running for several miles over a road that was comparatively straight. On either side were tidy farms, with occasional farmhouses and barns. Now, however, the road became winding, and they soon passed into a patch of timber.

"Four miles to the next town," announced Sam, as they rolled past a signboard. He looked at his watch. "Quarter after eleven. Do you think we had better stop there for dinner, Tom?"

"No, we are going on to Fernwood, six miles farther," was the reply. "They say the hotel there is much better. And, believe me, when you get away from the big cities the best hotel you can find in a town is none too good."

It had been rather warm on the open road, and all those in the automobiles welcomed the shade of the woods.

"It's a pity we didn't bring our lunch along," said Dora to Dick, as they moved along at a slower rate of speed. "We could have had a good time picnicking along here."

"Yes, we'll have to dine out in the woods sometimes on this trip," put in Mrs. Laning. "I like that sort of thing much better than taking all our meals in hotels or restaurants."

The first automobile had reached a spring by the roadside, and here Tom came to a halt, presently followed by the others. Collapsible cups were handy, and all were ready for a drink of the pure, cool water which the spring afforded.

"Fine! isn't it?" exclaimed Dick, after the ladies had been served and he had had a cupful himself.

"You're right," answered Tom. "A good deal better than that bottled water we have down in the New York offices."

"But it can't beat the water on the farm," said Sam. "I must say no matter where I go the water doesn't taste quite as good as that at Valley Brook."

"Oh, that's only sentiment, Sam!" cried Grace. "Now, I think the water at Cedarville is just lovely."

"I think you are taking a little chance in

drinking from a spring like this," was Chester Waltham's comment. "It may be pure, and then again it may be full of all sorts of germs."

"Sure! it may be full of tadpoles and bullfrogs, too," added Tom, gaily. "But you've got to take some chances in this life, as the fly said when he flew down into the molasses jug and got stuck there," and at this little joke there was a general smile.

Beyond the spring the road went uphill for a long distance, and then took a turn to the southward, past more farms and over a bridge spanning a tiny stream. Then they came to a small town, looking dry, dusty and almost deserted in the midday, summer sun.

"I am glad we didn't arrange to stop here," was Nellie's comment, as she glanced around.

The sleepy little town was soon left behind, and once again they found themselves passing over a series of hills, dotted here and there with farms and patches of woodland. Then they came to a place which was very uneven and filled with rocks.

"Got to be careful here unless we want to get a puncture," announced Tom, and at once reduced speed.

They were running on another winding road which seemed to bear off to the northward. Here

there was something of a cliff, with great, rocky boulders standing out in bold relief.

Suddenly, as Tom reached a bend, he saw a man coming towards them. He was an Italian, and carried a small red flag in one hand.

"Back! You-a git-a back!" cried the man, waving his red flag at them. "Blas'! Blas'! You git-a back!"

The grade was downward and the man had appeared so suddenly that before Tom could bring the first automobile to a standstill he had gotten at least a hundred feet beyond the Italian, while the second car, run by Dick, was by the man's side.

"What's the trouble here?" demanded Dick.

"You git-a back! You git-a back!" exclaimed the Italian, frantically. "Blas' go off! You git-a back!"

"Hi, Tom, come back here!" yelled Dick. "This fellow says there is a blast going off."

Tom was already trying to heed the warning. He had stopped so suddenly, however, that he had stalled his engine and now he had to take time in which to use the electric starter. In the meanwhile, the Italian workman ran still farther back, to warn Chester Waltham and anybody else who might be coming along the road.

"Oh, Tom! can you turn around?" questioned his wife anxiously.

"Maybe you had better run the car backward," suggested Sam. He had noted the narrowness of the roadway and knew it would be no easy matter to turn around in such limited space. Besides that, there was a deep gully on one side, so that they would run the risk of overturning.

"Yes, I'll back if Dick will only give me room," muttered Tom, as he pressed the lever of the self-starter. Then after the power was once more generated he threw in the reverse gear and allowed the car to back up.

"That's the way to do it, Tom," yelled Dick. "Come on, I'll get out of the way," and he, too, began to back until he was close on to the Waltham runabout.

"Look out! Don't bump into me!" yelled Chester Waltham, who for the moment seemed to be completely bewildered by what was taking place. "What's the matter anyway?" he demanded of the Italian.

"Oh, Chester, there must be some danger!" shrieked his sister. "Say! they are both backing up. Maybe you had better back up too."

"All right, if that's what they want," answered the young millionaire, and then in his hurry tried

to reverse so quickly that he, too, stalled his engine.

"Back up! Back up!" called out Dick. "We've got to get out of here! There is some sort of blasting going on ahead!"

"Oh, Dick, be careful!" cried Mrs. Stanhope, and sprang up in the tonneau of the car in alarm, quickly followed by Mrs. Laning.

"You will run into Mr. Waltham, sure!" wailed the latter.

"Don't smash into me! Don't smash into me!" yelled the young millionaire in sudden terror. "If you bump into me you'll send me into the ditch!"

By this time Dick's car was less than three feet away from the runabout, while Tom's machine was still some distance farther up the road.

Boom! There was a distant explosion, not very loud; and following this came a clatter as of stones falling on the rocks. None of the stones, however, fell anywhere near the three machines.

"Oh!" cried Grace.

"Is that all there is to it?" queried Nellie, anxiously.

"I don't know," returned Tom. He had now brought his automobile once more to a standstill.

All in the three machines waited for a moment. Then they gazed enquiringly at the Italian who stood behind them.

"Say, is that all the blasting there is?" demanded Chester Waltham.

"Dat's heem," responded the foreigner. "He go off all right, boss. You go," and he waved the stick of his flag for them to proceed.

"Some scare—and all for nothing," muttered Tom. "The way he carried on you would think they were going to shake down half of yonder cliff."

"Oh, Tom, they don't dare to take chances," returned Nellie. "Why, if we had gone on we might have been showered with those stones we heard falling."

"You fellows want to be careful how you back up," grumbled Chester Waltham. "You came pretty close to smashing into me."

"Well, you should have backed up yourself when you heard us yell," retorted Dick, sharply. "We didn't know how bad that blast was going to be."

Tom had already started forward, and in a moment more Dick and Chester Waltham followed. But hardly had they done this when the Italian on the road suddenly let out another yell.

"Boss! Boss! You-a stop!" he cried. "You-a

stop queek! De two-a blas'! You-a stop!" and he danced up and down in added alarm.

Those who had gone on paid no attention to him, and an instant later passed around a corner of the cliff. As they did this they saw a man on the open hillside waving his arm and shouting something they could not understand.

"Tom, something is wrong——" began Sam, when, of a sudden, his words were swallowed up in a fierce roar and rumble that seemed to shake the very ground beneath them. They saw a flash of fire in an opening of the cliff, and the next instant a burst of flames and smoke was followed by a rain of rocks all around them!

CHAPTER XXI

NEWS OF BLACKIE CROWDEN

It was a moment of extreme peril, and what made it seem worse was the fact that the Rovers and the others could do nothing to save themselves. Rocks, small stones and dirt flew all around them, striking with loud noises the hoods and other metal parts of the automobiles, and even landing in the tonneaus of the larger cars.

"Hold up the robes! Protect yourselves with the robes!" yelled Dick, but before the ladies could heed his words the rain of rocks, small stones and dirt had come to an end.

"Great Cæsar! that's a fine happening!" groaned Tom, who had been hit on the shoulder by a fair-sized stone. He looked quickly at those in the car with him. "Any of you hurt?"

"I got hit in the head with something," returned Sam. "But it didn't hurt very much. How about you?" and he looked at Grace and at Tom's wife.

"I—I don't think I am hurt any," faltered

Grace, as she looked at some stones and dirt on the robe over her lap.

"I'm all right," answered Tom's wife. "But, oh dear! something—I think it must have been a big stone—flew directly past my face!"

"I hope the others got off as well as we did," remarked Tom. "Let us go and see," and, suiting the action to the word, he left the machine, followed by his brother.

The second car had a dent in the hood made by a stone as big as Tom's fist. All those in the automobile had been hit by some smaller stones and also covered with loose dirt, but no one had been seriously injured, although Mrs. Laning declared that some of the dirt had entered her left ear and also her eye.

"Let me look at that eye," cried Mrs. Stanhope, as soon as she had recovered from the shock of the second blast. And then she went to work on the optic, and presently Mrs. Laning declared that the eye was as well as ever.

As Chester Waltham and his sister had been farther back on the road, around the turn of the cliff, they had not felt the effects of the second explosion excepting a slight shower of dirt which had covered the front of the runabout. But the young millionaire and his sister were greatly excited, and the former got out of his

machine to run up to the Italian with the red flag and shake his fist in the man's face.

"You—you rascal!" he spluttered. "What do you mean by sending us into such peril as this? You ought to be put into prison!"

"I-a, I-a forget heem," faltered the foreigner helplessly. "I tink only one blas'. I forget two blas'," and he looked very downhearted.

But this time the man who had been up on the hillside came running to the scene of the mishap, followed by several of the workmen.

"Anybody hurt?" sang out the man, who was an American in charge of the blasting gang.

"Nothing very serious," answered Dick. "But it might have been," he added sharply. "You fellows ought to be more careful."

"I told Tony to keep everybody back for two blasts," answered the man. "Why didn't you stay back until you heard the second blast?"

"He told us to go on," answered Tom.

"I make mistake," cried the Italian. "You forgive, boss," and he looked pleadingly at Dick and the others.

"Well, you don't want to make any more mistakes like that," returned Dick. "If we had gotten a little closer somebody might have been killed."

"That's the second time you have failed to

obey orders, Tony," said the gang master, sternly. "You go on up to the shanty and get your time and clear out. I won't have such a careless man as you around."

At these words the Italian looked much crestfallen. He began to jabber away in a mixture of English and his own tongue, both to his boss and to our friends. But the boss would not listen to him, and ordered him away, and then he departed, looking decidedly sullen.

"I can't do anything with some of these fellows," explained the man in charge of the blasting. "I tell them just what to do, and sometimes they mind me and sometimes they don't. I'm very sorry this thing happened, but I'm thankful at the same time that you got through as well as you did," and he smiled a little.

"You're not half as thankful as we are," put in Sam, dryly.

"I hope there is no damage done to your cars, but if there is I'm willing to pay for it," went on the man.

"A few dents, but I guess that is all," answered Dick, after a look at both the car he was driving and the one run by his brother. "We'll let those go, for we are on a tour and have no time to waste here."

"All right, sir, just as you say. But here is

my card; I don't want to sneak out of anything for which I'm responsible," continued the man. "If you find anything wrong later on you let me know and I'll fix it up with you."

"We ought to sue this fellow for damages!" cried Chester Waltham, wrathfully. "It's an outrage to treat us like this."

"Were you hurt in any way?" asked the man, quietly.

"We got a lot of dirt and stones on the runabout," growled Waltham.

"Oh, Chester! don't quarrel over the matter," entreated his sister, in a low tone. "The man didn't want to do it."

"Oh, these follows are too fresh," grumbled the young millionaire. "The authorities ought to take them in hand," and then he reëntered his runabout, looking in anything but a happy mood.

"Do you think we can go ahead on this road now?" asked Dick, after a few more words had passed between the Rovers and the man who had the blasting in charge.

"I think so," was the reply. "Just wait a few minutes and I'll have my gang of men clear a way for you." He was evidently a fair and square individual who wanted to do the right thing in every particular, and the Rovers could not help but like him.

"It was all that Italian's fault," remarked Sam to Tom, while they were waiting for the road to be cleared of the largest of the rocks. "If he had kept us back as he was ordered to do there would have been no trouble."

"He looked mighty mad when he went off," was Tom's answer. "If that fellow in charge here doesn't look out, that chap may put up some job on him."

Inside of ten minutes the man in charge of the blasting told them they could go ahead, and so on they went as before, with Tom again in the lead. As they passed by they saw numerous places along the face of the cliff where other blasting had taken place. The man had explained that the work was being done by the contractors in order to widen the road in that vicinity.

About a mile and a half beyond the cliff, nestling in the midst of a number of pretty farms, they came to the town of Fernwood, the place at which they were to stop for their midday meal. They had the name of the leading hotel on their list, and found the hostelry a fairly large and comfortable one.

"I think we'll want a good washing up after that experience," remarked Dick, when the automobiles had been placed in the hotel garage.

"My! but that was a narrow escape!" and he shuddered at the recollection.

"You fellows were mighty easy with that man," observed Chester Waltham. "He ought to have been made to suffer for his carelessness."

"Well, if you want to sue him, Waltham, you go ahead and do it," said Dick somewhat sharply. He was beginning to like the young millionaire less and less the more he came in contact with him.

A table had been reserved for the entire party, and soon the well-cooked meal put even Chester Waltham in better humor. Now that the danger from the blast was a thing of the past, they could afford to smile over the somewhat thrilling experience.

"Maybe after this it would be a good idea to ride with the tops up," said Tom. "Only we'd have to make them stone proof as well as rain-proof," and at this remark there was a general smile.

"Remember, Tom, I'm to be at the wheel this afternoon," announced Sam, who thus far had not had much chance to do any steering on the trip.

"All right, little boy, you for the pilot act!" returned his fun-loving brother, gaily. "But remember what the girls told you—no speeding.

The law in this state is four and one-eighth miles an hour, except on turning corners, where it is two and one-sixteenth miles," and at this little joke there was a titter from the girls.

As it was so warm during the middle of the day, it had been decided that they should not proceed on their tour until about three o'clock. This gave the ladies a chance to rest themselves, something which was particularly satisfying to Mrs. Stanhope and Mrs. Laning.

"I think I'll take a look around the town," said Tom, after the ladies had gone to one of the upper rooms. "Will you go along?" and he looked enquiringly at his brothers and Chester Waltham.

"I am going to write a letter to dad," answered Dick.

"I think I'll write a letter myself and enjoy a smoke," came from the young millionaire.

"I'm with you, Tom," returned his younger brother. "Let's go out and see if we can't capture a nice box of chocolates for the girls."

Tom and Sam were soon on the way. The main street of Fernwood contained less than four blocks of stores, and there was a cross street with half a dozen other establishments. But the place was a railroad center and, consequently, was of quite some importance.

Having walked up and down the main street, and procured a box of chocolates and a few other things, the two Rovers wandered off in the direction of the railroad station. A train had just come in, and they watched the passengers alight and then others get aboard. They were particularly interested in the discomfiture of a fat traveling salesman who came puffing up on the platform, a suitcase in each hand, just in time to see the train depart. The fat man was very angry, but this availed him nothing.

"It's a shame! a shame!" howled the traveling salesman, as he threw his suitcases down in disgust. "I know that train left at least two minutes ahead of time," he stormed to the station master.

"You're wrong there, mister," was the ready answer. "She was a minute late."

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" stormed the disappointed individual. "I tell you she left ahead of time. I ought to sue the railroad company for this," and he shook his head savagely.

"Gosh! we are up against people who want to sue everybody," was Sam's remark. "That fellow ought to join Chester Waltham, and then they could hire one lawyer to do the whole business."

"I might have been here five minutes ago if

I hadn't been a fool," stormed the fat salesman, as he looked for comfort at the two Rovers. "That comes from trying to be accommodating. I was headed for this place when down there at the Ludding House I met a fellow who wanted to know how to get to Stockbridge. He stuttered so that it took me about five minutes to find out what he wanted."

"Stuttered, did he?" questioned Tom, curiously.

"He sure did! He had an awful stutter with a funny little whistle in between. I wish I hadn't waited to listen to him. I might have had that train, confound it!" went on the fat salesman, pulling down his face.

"Did you say that fellow stuttered and whistled?" broke in Sam eagerly.

"He certainly did."

"Will you tell me what kind of a looking man he was?"

"Sure!" answered the salesman, and then started to give as good a description of the individual as his recollection would permit.

"It must have been Blackie Crowden!" cried the youngest Rover, before the man had finished.

"I don't know what his name was," said the salesman.

"We want to catch that man the worst way,"

went on Sam. "Have you any idea where we can find him?"

"He asked me the way to Stockbridge, so I suppose he was going there," was the reply.

"Where is Stockbridge?"

"It's down on the road past the Ludding House. It's about five miles from here."

"Do you suppose the man was going to walk it?"

"I don't know about that. You must remember I was in a hurry to catch the train. Hang the luck! I wish I hadn't stopped to talk to that man," went on the fat salesman.

"And I'm very glad that you did stop to talk to him," returned Sam. He looked at his brother. "Come on, Tom, let us see if we can find Blackie Crowden."

CHAPTER XXII

ON THE TRAIL

THE Ludding House was on the side street of the town, about three blocks from the hotel at which our friends were stopping. When the two Rovers arrived there they found the dining-room had just closed and only two men and an elderly woman were in sight.

"We are looking for a man who was around here—I think his name was Blackie Crowden," said Sam. "He is a man who stutters very badly."

"Oh, yes, I remember that fellow," returned one of the men who worked around the hotel, "He was here for lunch."

"Can you tell me where he is now?"

"No, I cannot."

"That man who stuttered so terribly said something about going to Stockbridge," put in the woman. "Perhaps he was going there."

"On foot?"

"I don't think so. Most likely he took the stage. That left about ten minutes ago."

"Was the man alone?" asked Tom.

"I think he was, although I am not sure. He came in during the lunch hour and after that I saw him talking to a salesman who had been staying here—a man who just went off on the train."

"You mean a man who went off to catch the train," grinned Tom. "He didn't get it, and he's as mad as a hornet on that account."

The two Rovers asked several more questions and found out that the stage which left Fernwood twice a day passed through Stockbridge on its way to Riverview, six miles farther on.

"They used to use horses," explained the hotel man, "but last year Jerry Lagger got himself an auto, so he makes the run pretty quick these days."

"Come on, Sam, let's get one of our autos and follow that stage," cried Tom, and set off on a run for the other hotel, quickly followed by his brother. They burst in on Dick just as the latter was posting the letter which he had written to their father.

"Say! that would be great if it was Blackie Crowden and we could capture him," cried Dick, on hearing what they had to say. "You get the auto ready while I tell the others where we are going."

"It's a pity Stockbridge and Riverview are not on our regular tour," was Sam's comment.

"Oh, it's just as well," answered Tom. "We may have lots of trouble with this fellow Crowden, and it will be just as well if the girls and the ladies are not in it."

One of the touring cars was quickly run to the front of the hotel, and a moment later Dick, who had rushed upstairs to explain matters to the others, came out and joined his brothers. Tom was at the wheel, and he lost no time in speeding up the car, and on they went along the dusty road in the direction of Stockbridge.

"I do hope they catch that fellow and get back Mr. Sanderson's money," was Grace's comment, as she watched the departure of the touring car out of one of the upper windows of the hotel.

"What's it all about?" asked Ada Waltham, who had not been present when Dick had burst in on the others. She was quickly told and then asked: "Why didn't they take my brother along with them?"

"I don't know, I am sure, Ada," answered Grace. "Perhaps he wasn't around."

"He was down in the writing-room with Dick."

"Well, I am sure I don't know why he isn't with them," was the reply.

"I don't think they are treating Chester just right," retorted the rich girl, rather abruptly, and then left the room with her nose tilted high in the air.

"What a way to act!" murmured Nellie.

"I am afraid that sooner or later we will have some sort of rupture with the Walthams," was Dora's comment. She gave a little sigh. "Too bad! I should hate to have anything happen to spoil this tour."

"Well, I don't think the boys treat Chester Waltham just right," returned Grace, somewhat coldly. "They treat him as if he were a stranger —an outsider," and then she, too, left the room, leaving her sister and Dora to gaze at each other questioningly.

Along the dusty road sped the touring car, Tom running as rapidly as safety would permit. Soon Fernwood was left far behind and they began to ascend a slight hill.

Presently they came to a crossroad, and here they had to stop to study a much-faded signboard, so as to decide which was the proper road to take. Even then, as they continued their way, they were all a little doubtful.

"That signboard was so twisted it didn't point

right down this road," was Sam's comment. "It would be just like some boys to twist it out of shape just for the fun of sending folks on the wrong road."

"Well, I played a joke like that myself, once," confessed Tom.

"Then if we are on the wrong road on account of some boys' tricks, Tom, you'll simply be getting paid back for what you did," returned his older brother.

Half a mile more was covered, and then the road grew rapidly worse. Tom had slowed down, and was just on the point of stopping when a low hissing sound reached the ears of all.

"Good-night!" was Tom's comment.

"What is it, Tom, a puncture?" queried Sam.

"Oh, no, it's only a gas well trying to find its way to the surface of the ground," was the dry comment. "Everybody out and to work!"

They leaped to the ground and soon saw that Sam's conjecture was correct. A sharp stone had cut into one of the front shoes, making a hole about as large in diameter as a slate pencil.

"Might know a thing like this would happen just when we were in a hurry," grumbled Dick.

"Never mind, now is our time to make a record," came cheerfully from Sam. He glanced at his watch. "Four minutes after two. Come

on, let us see how quickly we can get that new tire on."

All threw off their coats and caps and set to work in the shade of some trees. While one jacked up the car, another worked to get off the damaged shoe and inner tube. In the meanwhile, the third got ready another shoe with an inner tube, and thus working hand in hand the three got the new tire in place and pumped up in less than ten minutes.

While Dick and Sam were putting away the tools, Tom walked a bit ahead on the road. He looked around a turn, and then came back much crestfallen.

"Well, I'm paid back for monkeying with those road-signs years ago," he announced. "The fellows who fixed that sign some distance behind us have got one on me. This is nothing but a woods road, and ends in the timber right around the bend."

"Which means that we have got to turn back and take the other road," put in Sam, quickly.

"That's it! Some fun turning around here," was Dick's comment. "It's about as narrow as it was on that road where they were doing the blasting."

"Oh, I guess I can make it," answered Tom; and then all got in the car once again.

By going ahead and backing half a dozen times, Tom at last managed to get the touring car headed the other way. Then he put on speed once more and they raced off to where they had made the false turn.

But all this had taken time and as a consequence, although they ran along the other highway at a speed of nearly forty miles an hour, they saw nothing of the auto-stage which had gone on ahead.

"I guess this is Stockbridge," was Dick's comment, a little later, as they came in sight of a straggling village. Several buggies and farm wagons were in sight and likewise a couple of cheap automobiles, but nothing that looked like a stage.

"Has the auto-stage from Fernwood got in yet?" questioned Sam of a storekeeper who sat in a tilted chair under the wooden awning of his establishment.

"Yes, it got in some time ago," was the drawled-out reply of the storekeeper.

"Then has it gone on to Riverview?" queried Dick.

"Reckon it has, stranger."

"Do you know if any passengers got off here?" asked Tom.

"Old Mrs. Harrison got off."

"Anybody else?"

"I didn't see anybody else,—but then I wasn't watchin' very closely," explained the storekeeper.

The only other persons in sight besides the storekeeper were two children, too small to be questioned about the stage passengers. The Rovers looked at each other questioningly.

"Might as well go right through and follow that stage," said Dick. "If he is on board, there is no use of letting him get away. If he isn't, we can come back here and look for him."

The others deemed this good advice, and in a moment more they left Stockbridge at a rate of speed which made the storekeeper leap up from his comfortable chair to gaze after them in amazement.

"Some of them speeders," he murmured to himself. "If they don't look out they'll be took in for breakin' the law."

For a mile or more the road outside of Stockbridge was fairly good. Beyond, it grew poorer and poorer, and Tom had to reduce speed once more for fear of another puncture, or a blowout. As they sped along the highway all the youths kept a sharp lookout for Blackie Crowden, but no one came in sight who answered in the least to the description of that individual.

"I'm sure I'd know him if I saw him," said

Sam, who had studied a copy of the man's photograph.

"So would I," answered Tom. "He's got a face that is somewhat unusual;" and to this Dick agreed.

On and on they went, the road now being little more than a country lane. Here the dust was about six inches deep, and a big cloud floated behind the machine.

"Almost looks as if we were on the wrong road again," observed Dick. But hardly had he spoken when they came out to another cross-road. Here a signboard pointed to the left, and the highway was as good as any they had yet traveled.

"Only one mile more!" cried Sam.

"It won't take long to cover that," answered Tom, and then turned on the power, and in less than two minutes more they were approaching the center of Riverview, a fair-sized town located on the stream which gave it its name.

"There is the auto-stage, drawn up in front of the hotel," announced Sam.

"Yes. And it's empty," answered Dick.

The driver of the auto-stage was at the town pump getting a drink of water. He looked at the three Rovers curiously as they confronted him.

"Did I have a passenger that stuttered?" he repeated in answer to their question. "I sure did have such a fellow. Why, he stuttered wo'se than any man I ever heard. And he whistled too. Awful funny. Why, I had all I could do to keep from laughin' in his face."

"We want to find that man very much and right away," announced Dick. "Will you let us know where you let him off?"

"That's a funny thing, mister," announced the auto-stage driver. "You see, after we left Stockbridge I didn't have nobody in but that man. He paid me the fare to this place before I started. Then when we was about half-way here I looked around in the back of the stage and, by gum! he was gone."

"Gone!" came from the three Rovers.

"Yes, sir, he was gone. I looked back and there he stood on the side of the road. As soon as he saw that I saw him, he waved his hand to me and disappeared."

CHAPTER XXIII

BACK AT ASHTON

THE three Rovers listened in astonishment to what the auto-stage driver had to say concerning the sudden disappearance of Blackie Crowden.

"Then he must have jumped from the stage while you were running," remarked Dick.

"That's just what he did do, mister. And he took some chances, too, believe me, for I wasn't runnin' at less than twenty miles an hour."

"Did he have any baggage with him?" questioned Tom.

"He had a small handbag, that's all."

"Would you remember the place where he jumped off?" came from Sam, eagerly.

"Yes, it was on the road back of here—just before you turn into this highway."

"You mean the road that was so thick with dust?" remarked Tom.

"That's the place. He jumped off at a spot where the bushes are pretty thick, and there

are three trees standin' close together just back of the bushes."

"I think I know that place," said Dick. "There is a small white cottage on the hillside just behind it."

"You've struck it," answered the stage driver. "I reckon as how he was goin' to call on somebody at the cottage. But why he didn't ask me to stop is a mystery. Why! he might have broken a leg gettin' off that way."

"That man is a criminal, and he did it to throw you off his track," announced Sam. "Do you know what I think?" he continued to his brothers. "I think Blackie Crowden must have gotten on to the fact that we were at Fernwood, and made up his mind to clear out as soon as possible. Then he got afraid that we might question folks, including this stage driver, and so jumped from the auto-stage to throw us off his trail, provided we should follow the stage."

"I guess you have struck the nail on the head, Sam," answered his oldest brother. "But come on, let us see if we can find some trace of him." And in less than a minute more they had turned their machine around and were heading for the spot mentioned to them by the stage driver.

It was only a short run, and soon they halted beside the bushes hedging in three tall trees.

Eagerly they looked around in all directions, but not a soul was in sight.

"I'm going up to the farmhouse," announced Sam.

"And I'll go with you," added Dick. "Tom, you stay down here and take a look around. If you see anything of him blow the auto horn three times."

At the farmhouse the two Rovers found themselves confronted by an elderly man and his wife, who looked at them rather curiously.

"No, there hasn't been anybody around here so far as I know," announced the farmer. "We haven't had a visitor for several days."

"I was out to the well about five minutes ago," put in his wife, "and if anybody had come up to the house or the barn I'd have seen him."

"The fellow we are after is a criminal," explained Dick, "so if you don't mind we'll take a look around for him."

"A criminal!" cried the farmer. "Say, that's bad! Certainly look around all you please, and I hope if he is anywhere near you'll catch him. I'd go around with you myself, only I can't very well on account of this rheumatism of mine."

The two Rovers walked around the cottage and the out-buildings but found not the least

trace of Blackie Crowden. Then, rather crestfallen, they returned to the automobile.

"Perhaps there's some mistake and it wasn't Crowden at all," was Sam's comment.

"Well, it was a man who stuttered, anyway, and the general description fitted Crowden," answered his brother.

When they reached the automobile, they found Tom gazing curiously at a piece of newspaper which he had picked up from the ground. It was rather crumpled, as if it had been used for wrapping purposes.

"See anything of him, Tom?" asked Dick.

"No," was the answer. "But look here. Do either of you recognize this print?" He held out the paper, which was the lower half of a newspaper page. Part of this was devoted to reading matter and the rest to advertisements.

"Why, sure! I know that paper," cried Dick. "See that advertisement of The Russel Department Store and that advertisement of Betts' Shoe Store? That's a part of the *Knoxbury Weekly Leader.*"

"That's just what it is!" ejaculated Sam. "Where did you get that paper, Tom?"

"Found it right here beside the bushes. It looks as if it had been used to wrap something in."

"Then that proves two things," announced Dick, flatly. "One is that the man who stutters was really Blackie Crowden, for who else could have been here with something wrapped in a Knoxbury newspaper? And the other thing is that he did as the stage driver said—left that stage somewhere near here."

"Right you are, Dick," returned his youngest brother, "but that doesn't answer the question—where is he now?"

"I think he got on to the fact that we were in Fernwood, and that it was his business to get out just as quickly as he could," said Tom. "And if that is true it is more than likely that he is a good distance away from here by now and keeping to side roads where he thinks he will not be followed."

"But what brought him to Fernwood in the first place?" questioned Sam.

"Give it up. Of course, he may have friends or relatives here. But I don't know how we are going to find out the truth about that, and what good will it do us if we do?"

A half hour was spent in that vicinity, the boys tramping up and down the road and through the fields and woods looking for some trace of the missing man. Then they returned to Fernwood.

"I'm going down to the post-office to post our

letters," announced Dick. "I'll see if the postmaster knows anything about Crowden."

The postmaster of Fernwood was a young man and glad enough to give what information he could when he heard what Dick had to say.

"Yes, that man was here several times," he remarked. "He seemed very anxious to get some letters, and he posted several letters himself, although whom they were addressed to I don't know."

"You haven't any idea where he was stopping?"

"Not the slightest." And this was all the postmaster could tell them.

"No use of our staying here any longer," announced Tom, when the boys had rejoined the others at the hotel. "I guess Crowden just came to this out-of-the-way place to get and send mail."

"Don't you think he'll come back, thinking there'll be some letters for him?" questioned his wife.

"We'll take care of that," was the reply. "We'll notify the local authorities and also the postmaster, so if Crowden turns up again he'll be arrested at once;" and this matter was attended to before they left the town.

Chester Waltham grumbled somewhat because the Rovers had not taken him along on the trip

to Riverview, but the three brothers paid little attention to this, although Sam showed that he was rather anxious because of the way in which Grace stood up for the brother of her seminary chum.

It had been planned that the tour from Valley Brook to the west should be taken through Ashton, so one morning a few days later found the whole party in the old college town.

"Too bad that Brill and Hope are both closed for the season," remarked Dora. "We might have met some of our old friends."

"Well, it doesn't make much difference to me," grinned back Sam. "It seems like only yesterday since I graduated."

"I am glad my school days are over," announced Ada Waltham. "I never did care for studying."

Before proceeding farther, the Rovers had decided to call on the Sandersons, so they went away from the hotel at Ashton, leaving the Walthams behind. A letter had been sent ahead to Minnie, so she was not much surprised at their arrival. Her appearance, however, shocked them greatly. From looking round and ruddy her face had taken on a pale and careworn look.

"We are having all sorts of bad luck this year," she said, in answer to an inquiry of Dora, and

while the boys had gone off to find Mr. Sanderson, who was at the barn. "First came the loss of that money. Then father was taken sick, and now he tells me that the crops this year are not going to be nearly as good as usual."

"That is certainly too bad, Minnie," said Dora, sympathetically. "I wish we could do something to help you." She paused for a moment. "I suppose you hear from Songbird occasionally?"

"Oh, yes, he writes to me regularly. He is hard at work, and last week he sent father a check for one hundred dollars. This, of course, is a good deal of money for the poor fellow to scrape together, but it isn't much towards four thousand dollars."

"It certainly is too bad about the crops not being good," said Nellie, who, being the daughter of a farmer, knew exactly what such a calamity means to the average man who depends on the soil for his living.

"Father wouldn't mind it so much if it was not for this interest on the mortgage. You see he had expected to pay the whole amount off and that, of course, would stop the interest. Now he has to pay the usual amount, two hundred and forty dollars a year, which, you see, is twenty dollars a month. It worries him a good deal."

"Did you say Songbird sent him a hundred dollars?" questioned Grace, curiously.

"Yes. It was money he had earned and some that his folks had given him. I am glad to say father didn't think much of accepting it at first," added Minnie, her face brightening a little. "But poor John urged it, so that at last he took it and sent it over to the bank."

"Then I suppose Songbird and your father are on fairly good terms now," remarked Dora.

"No, I am sorry to say that is not true, Dora. At first father seemed to get over it, but lately he has been as bitter as ever. You see, his sickness, and the bad crops, and the interest money to be paid on the mortgage, worry him a great deal, and he takes it all out on poor John. He sticks to it that John should have been more careful while he was carrying such a large amount." Minnie turned her face away and two tears stole down her cheeks. "It's a shame—an awful, burning shame! But what in the world am I to do?"

"It surely is too bad, Minnie," said Dora, kindly, placing her arm around the girl's waist, while Nellie and Grace looked on sympathetically. "If we could help you at all we would do it. We have some news of Blackie Crowden, and the others have gone out to tell your father about

it," and then she related what had occurred during the stop at Fernwood.

"Oh! if only they could find that fellow and get back the money!" sobbed Minnie. "But maybe the most of it has been spent," she added, dolefully.

"Oh, let us hope not!" cried Nellie. "He couldn't spend any such amount as that in so short a time."

"He might if he drank and gambled it away," put in her sister. "Oh, wouldn't it be too bad if they did catch this Blackie Crowden and then found that he had squandered all that money!"

CHAPTER XXIV

AT THE FESTIVAL

WHILE Dora and her cousins were talking to Minnie the others had sought out Mr. Sanderson, who was down in the barn superintending the stowing away of some grain. The farmer listened with interest to what they had to tell him about Blackie Crowden, but shook his head dolefully.

"I'm pretty well satisfied that they'll never get that money back for me now," he announced. "A fellow of that character would use up cash about as fast as he could lay hands on it."

"Well, let us live in hopes," returned Dick, not knowing what else to say.

The farmer asked them about their tour, and said he trusted that they would have a good time. Then Sam ventured to mention Songbird.

"Better not talk to me about that young man," declared Mr. Sanderson, drawing down the corners of his mouth. "He may mean well enough, but he's not my kind, and I've told Minnie she

had better stop having him call and also stop writing to him."

"Oh, Mr. Sanderson! I think you are doing our chum an injustice," cried Sam. "It wasn't his fault that he was robbed of that four thousand dollars."

"Humph! That's as how you look at it," grumbled the farmer. "I've said what I think, and I'll stick to it." And nothing that the Rovers could say would alter his decision in this matter.

"Oh, I'm so sorry for Minnie I really don't know how to express myself," were Dora's words, when the party were once more on the way to the Ashton hotel. "If her father compels her to give up Songbird it will just about break her heart."

"I don't believe she's the one to give up Songbird," answered Sam. "She isn't that kind of girl," and he looked at Grace. But her eyes at that moment were turned in another direction. He followed the look and saw that she was gazing at Chester Waltham, who, with his sister, had driven their car to meet the others.

"There is one thing about this whole matter that worries me," said Dick, "and that is that when they catch this Blackie Crowden—and I think they'll land on the fellow sooner or later—most of the money may be gone. There will be

some satisfaction in placing such a rascal behind the bars, but that won't give Mr. Sanderson his cash back nor lift that mortgage."

"We've just got news and we thought we would let you know about it," cried Ada Waltham, as the runabout came to a standstill close to the other automobiles. "There is to be a grand festival at Larkinburg this evening, and if it is not necessary to stay in Ashton to-night we might as well go to that place and attend the festival. I received a letter at the Ashton post-office from two girls who used to go to Hope, and they are to be at the affair, and they write that it will be well worth attending."

"Oh, yes, let us go to Larkinburg by all means!" cried Grace. "I know the two girls—Jennie Cross and Mabel Stanford. The festival will certainly be well worth while if they say so."

"Let me see—how many miles is it to Larkinburg?" questioned Tom.

"Only sixty, so we can make the run with ease if we start directly after lunch," answered Chester Waltham.

The matter was talked over for a few minutes, and as a result it was decided to go ahead and make the town mentioned in ample time to attend the festival.

"They are going to have a concert and some

outdoor tableaux, with refreshments," said Grace. "Ada was telling me all about it."

"Well, that will be much better than staying in Ashton doing nothing," returned Dora. "And, besides, we must be getting along on our trip. Dick says we are really a day behind in our schedule."

During the stop at the Ashton hotel for lunch, Chester Waltham had been very attentive to Grace and had asked her if she did not wish to change places with his sister on the run to Larkinburg; but she had declined, offering some excuse which was far from satisfactory to the young millionaire.

"I thought you were going to put in part of this tour with me," he had said, rather reproachfully. "Besides, if you will come in with me it will give Ada a chance to visit with the others."

"Well, I'll ride with you some time," Grace had answered. "I want Ada to have as good a time as any of us."

The long hours spent on the road had proved rather tiring to Mrs. Stanhope and Mrs. Laning, and when Larkinburg was reached they were glad enough to rest in a comfortable room which Dick engaged for them.

"You young folks can go to the festival," said Mrs. Stanhope, with a smile. "We are going

to stay here and go to bed early;" and so it was arranged.

The festival was held in a large grove bordering a beautiful stream and located some distance from the center of the town. As soon as our friends had arrived they had called up the two former students of Hope, and it had been decided that these girls, along with their escorts, should join the others and all should attend the festival together.

"We can easily pack the whole crowd in our three cars," announced Dick.

"I can't carry any extra people in my runabout," complained Chester Waltham. "Of course, one of the fellows might stand on the running board, but——"

"We'll take them, don't worry," answered Sam. "We've got some vacant seats, you know, and four extra won't count."

The girls from Hope were a jolly pair and so were the two young men who accompanied them. All got in the Rovers' machines, and away they went, followed closely by the Waltham runabout. A parking space had been set aside, and there our friends found themselves surrounded by machines of all sorts, and a jolly, laughing crowd numbering several thousands of people.

"Oh, how pretty!" burst from Grace's lips, as

they strolled toward the place where the concert and the tableaux were to be given.

A stage had been constructed among some trees and bushes with a background of the river, and here scores of lamps and lanterns twinkled forth. The seats were placed along a sloping bank, and soon the whole crowd was gathered to listen to the opening number of the concert.

As soon as the machines were parked Chester Waltham, almost ignoring his sister, had devoted his attention to Grace, doing this while Sam was busy talking over some matters with his brothers. Waltham had walked over to the seats with Grace beside him, and now he saw to it that she was placed where he could talk to her with ease. This, of course, did not particularly suit Sam, but he was helpless in the matter and so made the best of it.

The concert was a fine one and the tableaux, which were interspersed between the various musical numbers, were intensely interesting.

"Certainly well worth attending," was Tom's comment, when that portion of the festival came to an end amid a loud clapping of hands.

"And now for some refreshments," announced Dick. "Come on, let us hurry or the tables may all be filled," for some long tables decorated with

lanterns had been set under the trees at one side of the grove.

"My! but it is rather chilly here," was Grace's comment, when they were moving toward the tables. "I feel positively cold."

"Didn't you bring your jacket?" questioned Sam.

"Yes, but I left it in the auto."

"I'll go and get it," he returned, and ran off to procure the garment. He found that more machines had come in, and it was some little while before he could locate their automobile and pick out the jacket.

In the meanwhile, Chester Waltham, leaving his sister with the other girls from Hope, had gone on with Grace and seated her at one of the tables, with the others of the party opposite. There was but one vacant seat left next to Grace, and this the young millionaire appropriated.

"I don't know what Sam will do when he gets here," remarked Grace, anxiously.

"Oh, I guess he'll find a seat somewhere," answered Chester Waltham, coolly.

The youngest Rover was rather surprised on getting back to find every seat filled and the young millionaire sitting beside the girl who was so dear to his heart, but he made no comment. He helped Grace don the jacket, and then stood

back until there was a vacant seat at a table some distance away.

"I think it was rather mean of Chester Waltham to appropriate that seat," whispered Nellie to Dora while they were being served.

"I think so myself, Nellie," was the low reply.

At last the festival came to an end, and all those in the crowd prepared to go home.

"I hope you enjoyed your refreshments," said Sam, rather coolly, as he came up to Grace's side.

"Why, yes, I enjoyed them very much," answered the girl. She looked at him rather pointedly. "Didn't you think the sandwiches and cake and other things were very nice?"

"Nice enough," he grumbled. "Come on, let us get back to the hotel, I'm as tired as a dog," and he started to walk away, leaving the others to follow him.

His words and the manner in which they were spoken rather nettled Grace, and she walked toward the automobiles in silence, with the others in front and behind her. But Chester Waltham remained at her side, and as they approached the machines he caught her by the arm.

"Say, Grace, come on and take a ride with me," he half whispered. "It's a beautiful night.

Come on, you don't want to go back to the hotel yet."

"But what about Ada?" she questioned.

"Oh, she can take your place in one of the other autos, can't she?"

"I—I—suppose so," faltered Grace. She hardly knew how to go on. She did not wish particularly to take a ride with Waltham, and, at the same time, she was hurt over the way Sam had spoken to her.

"See here, Sis," cried the young millionaire, "I am going to take Miss Laning back in my runabout. She says you can take her place with the Rovers."

"Oh, all right, Chester," answered the sister. "Hope you have a nice time of it," she added to Grace.

There was a large crowd down among the automobiles, and our friends had all they could do in the semi-darkness to get their machines out on the road in safety.

"Where is Grace?" demanded Sam, as some of the others came up to him. He had just turned on the lights of both cars.

"She is going to ride back with Chester," answered Ada Waltham. "You'll have to let me ride back with you," and she laughed lightly.

"Oh, all right. Come ahead," returned the

youngest Rover. He spoke as lightly as he could. He did not wish to let the others know his true feelings. There was a strange bitterness in his heart, and for the moment he wished that he had never come on this tour.

CHAPTER XXV

A CALL FOR ASSISTANCE

Ada Waltham did all she could to make herself agreeable to Sam and the others, but the youngest Rover was in no mood for raillery, and on the way back to Larkinburg had but little to say.

Chester Waltham had lost no time in assisting Grace into his runabout and in getting his car out of the congestion in the parking space. Then he put on speed, and soon the pair were whirled away out of the sight of the others.

"It's a dandy night for a ride," was Tom's remark. There was some moonshine, and the stars glittered clear in the heavens overhead.

"That is true, Tom," answered his wife, "but don't you think we had better get back to the hotel and go to bed? I heard Dick say something about a long day of it to-morrow."

"Oh, yes, Nellie, we'll get back. It wouldn't be fair to go off and leave mother and Mrs. Stanhope alone."

When they reached the hotel at Larkinburg the Rovers expected to find the Waltham runabout in the garage, and they were consequently somewhat surprised when they saw no sign of the machine.

"We certainly couldn't have passed them on the road," observed Dick. He turned to his youngest brother. "You didn't see them, did you?"

"No. They went on ahead," answered Sam, shortly; and his manner of speech showed that he was thoroughly out of sorts.

Having placed the touring cars in the care of the garage keeper, the Rovers joined the others on the piazza of the hotel. Then Dora slipped upstairs to see if her mother and Mrs. Laning were all right. She found both of them sleeping soundly, and did not disturb them.

Sam could not content himself with sitting down, and so lounged around in one place and another, and finally said he would go inside and write a letter to the folks at home. He was still writing when Tom came in to join him.

"Sam, did Chester Waltham say anything about where he was going to take Grace?" asked Tom, as he sat down beside his brother.

"No, he didn't say a word to me," was the short reply, and Sam went on writing.

"Did Grace say anything?"

"No."

Tom said nothing for a moment, drumming his fingers on the writing table. At last he heaved something of a sigh.

"Seems to me if they were going on a long ride they might have said something to us about it," he observed. "Nellie is rather worried."

"Oh, I guess they've got a right to take a ride if they want to," came rather crossly from Sam. He finished his letter with a flourish, folded it, and rammed it into an envelope which he quickly addressed.

"Oh, of course, but——" Tom did not finish, and as Sam, after stamping his letter, arose, he did the same. "I wonder if we had better stay up for them."

"I think I'll go to bed."

"Sam!" and Tom looked sharply at his younger brother.

"Well, what's the use of staying up?"

"A whole lot of use, Sam Rover, and you know it. If I were you I wouldn't let Chester Waltham ride over me."

"Who says I am letting him ride over me?" retorted Sam; and now his manner showed that he was quite angry.

"I say so," answered Tom, bluntly. "If you

have got half the sand in you that I always thought you had, you wouldn't stand for it. All of us know how matters were going on between you and Grace. Now to let this fellow step in, even if he is a young millionaire, is downright foolish. If you really care for Grace it's up to you to go in and take her."

"Yes, but suppose that she cares for Waltham and his money more than she cares for me?" asked Sam, hesitatingly.

"Do you think Grace is the kind of a girl to be caught by money, Sam?" and now, as the two were in a deserted part of the hallway, Tom took his brother by both arms and held him firmly.

"N—no, I—I can't say that exactly," faltered Sam. "But just the same, why does she favor him at all?"

"Maybe it's because you haven't been as outspoken as you ought to be. It's one thing for a girl to know what you think of her, but just the same the average girl wants you to tell her so in plain words. Now, it may not be any of my business, but you know that I want you to be happy, and that I am unusually interested because of Nellie. It seems to me if I were you I'd go to Grace the first chance I had and have a clear understanding."

"I—I can't go to her now. She's out with Waltham," stammered Sam.

"Then hang around until they get back and see to it that you have a chance to talk with her before she goes to her room," returned Tom; and then, as some other people came up, the conversation had to come to an end.

A half hour passed and Ada Waltham excused herself. "Chester and Grace must be having a fine ride," she observed on retiring, "otherwise they would have returned by this time."

"Maybe they had a breakdown," observed Dick. "I've been told that some of the roads around here are far from good."

"Oh, don't say that!" cried the girl. "Chester hates to have to make any repairs when he is alone. Time and again he has run to a garage on a flat tire rather than put another one on himself."

Another half hour dragged by, and now Dora turned to whisper to Dick.

"Don't you think we had better retire?" she asked. "I never supposed Grace was going to stay out as late as this."

"No, we'll stay up," he answered. "Nellie has told Tom that she isn't going to bed until her sister gets back, so it won't do for us to leave them here on the piazza alone."

"Mr. Rover! Telephone call for Mr. Rover!" came the announcement from a bellboy, as he appeared upon the piazza.

"Which Mr. Rover?" demanded Sam, eagerly.

"The party said any of 'em would do," answered the bellboy.

"I'll go," said Sam, eagerly, before either of his brothers or their wives could speak.

"All right, Sam. I'll follow in case you want me or any of the others," answered Tom.

The telephone booths were located in the lobby of the hotel, and Sam was quickly shown to one of them. While he talked Tom stood by, but caught only a few words of what was said.

"Hello!"

"Oh, is this you, Sam?" came over the wire in Grace's voice. "I'm so glad! I have been trying to get somebody for the last ten minutes but they couldn't give me the hotel connection."

"Where are you?" questioned the youth. "Has anything happened?" for the tone of the girl's voice indicated that she was very much agitated.

"Oh, Sam! I want you or some of the others to come and get me," cried Grace. "The runabout has broken down, and I don't think Mr. Waltham can fix it. And we are miles and miles away from Larkinburg!"

"A breakdown, eh? Why, sure, I'll come and get you, Grace. Where are you?"

"I am at a farmhouse on the road between Dennville and Corbytown—the Akerson place. If you come, take the road to Dennville and then drive toward Corbytown. We'll hang a lantern on the stepping block, so you will know where to stop."

"All right, Grace, I'll be there just as soon as I can make it," answered Sam; and then he added quickly: "You weren't hurt when the breakdown happened, were you?"

"Not very much, although I was a good deal shaken up. Mr. Waltham had his face and his hand scraped by the broken wind-shield."

"Well, you take good care of yourself, and I'll start right away," returned the youngest Rover, and after a few words more hung up the receiver.

It did not take Sam long to acquaint the others with what had occurred, and then he ran down to the hotel garage to get out one of the touring cars.

"Don't you think I had better go along?" asked Tom. "Chester Waltham may be in a fix and need assistance. And, besides, they may both be more hurt than Grace said."

"Yes, I guess you'd better come," answered

his brother. And soon, having received directions from the garage keeper as to how to get to Dennville, the pair were on the way.

"How did Grace seem to be when you spoke to her?" questioned Tom, as Sam ran the car as rapidly as the semi-darkness of the night permitted.

"She seemed to be all unstrung," was Sam's thoughtful reply.

"Then the accident may have been worse than she admitted, Sam."

"I hope not, but we'll soon see." And then, as a straight stretch of fairly good road appeared before them, Sam turned on the power and the touring car sped onward faster than ever.

Inside of half an hour they reached Dennville, a sleepy little town, located in the midst of a number of hills. All the houses were dark and the stores closed up, and not a soul was in sight. They ran into the tiny public square and there found several signboards.

"Here we are!" cried Sam. "Corbytown four miles this way," and he pointed with his hand.

"We'll look at the other signboards first to see whether there is another road," answered his brother. But there was only the one, and so Sam turned the touring car into this, and they sped forward once more, but now at a reduced

rate of speed, for the road was decidedly hilly and far from good.

"What possessed Waltham to take such a road as this," remarked Tom, after they had passed a particularly bad spot.

"Don't ask me!" was the reply. "It's no wonder he had a breakdown if he took this road on high speed."

They were going up a long hill. At the top a large and well-kept farm spread out, and, beyond, the hill dropped away on a road that was worse than ever.

"Hello! there's a light!" cried Tom, as they approached the house belonging to the farm.

"I see it," answered his brother; and in a few seconds more they ran up to the horse-block and brought the touring car to a standstill, Sam, at the same time, sounding the horn.

But the summons was unnecessary, for their approach had been eagerly looked for by Grace, and hardly had the machine come to a standstill when she flew out of the farmhouse to meet them.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come!" she burst out. "If you hadn't, I don't know what I should have done!" She was somewhat hysterical and on the verge of tears.

"Are you sure that you're not hurt, Grace?"

asked Sam, quickly; and as he spoke he caught her by one hand and placed an arm on her shoulder.

"I—I don't think I am hurt, Sam," she faltered, and then looked rather tearfully into his face. "But it was an awful experience—awful!" and then as he drew a little closer she suddenly burst into a fit of weeping and rested her head on his shoulder.

CHAPTER XXVI

SAM FREES HIS MIND

In spite of his fun-loving disposition, Tom Rover was a very wise young man, so as soon as he saw Grace resting on his brother's shoulder he promptly turned away, to interview the farmer and his wife who lived in the farmhouse and who had answered the girl's knock on their door.

"I can't tell much about the accident," said Mr. Akerson. "Me and my wife were just goin' to bed when the young lady knocked on the door and begged us to take her in, and then asked if we had a telephone. She said she had been in an automobile breakdown, but she didn't give us many particulars, except to say that she thought the front axle of the machine was broken."

"Well, a broken axle is bad enough," was Tom's prompt comment. "They are lucky that no necks were broken."

"The poor girl was dreadfully shook up," put in Mrs. Akerson. "She just went on somethin'

terrible. I had all I could do to quiet her at first."

"Didn't the young man come here with her?" questioned Tom.

"No. She said she had left him down on the road with the machine. She said he was all worked up over the accident."

"I should think he would be," returned Tom, and said no more on the subject. Yet he thought it very strange that Chester Waltham had not accompanied Grace to the farmhouse and thus made certain that help was summoned.

Tom and his brother had entered the sitting-room of the farmhouse. Next to it was a lit-up dining-room and to this Sam and Grace had walked, the latter between her sobs telling of what had happened.

"Oh, Sam, it was dreadful!" cried Grace. "Mr. Waltham was so reckless. I couldn't understand him at all. When I said I would ride with him I supposed we were going right back to the hotel. But on the way he said it was too fine a night to go in yet, and begged me to go a little farther, and so finally I consented. Then he drove the car on and on, ever so many miles, until we reached Dennville."

"But if you didn't want to go that far, Grace, why didn't you tell him?"

"I did—several times. But he wouldn't listen to me. Of course, I didn't want to act rude, and when I told him to turn back he only laughed at me. Then, when we got to Dennville, and I told him that I positively would not go any farther, he said, 'Oh, yes, you will. We are going to have a good, long ride. I am going to make you pay up in full for not riding with me before.' "

"The mean fellow!" murmured Sam. "I'd like to punch him for that."

"Oh, but, Sam! that wasn't the worst of it," went on the girl; and now she blushed painfully and hung her head. "Then he started up on this side road and he ran the car as fast as ever. I was dreadfully scared, but he only laughed and told me to enjoy myself, and when the car bumped over some stones, and I was thrown against him, he put his arm around me and—and he did his best to kiss me!"

"What!"

"But I didn't allow it. I pushed him away, and when he laughed at me I told him that if he tried it again I would box his ears. Then, just after we had passed this place, he reached over and caught hold of me and tried to pull me toward him. Then I boxed him, just as I had said I would. That made him furious, and he

put on a burst of speed, and the next minute there was a terrible bump and a crash, and both of us were almost thrown out of the car. The wind-shield was broken and also, I think, the front axle, and he was scratched in several places. Oh, it was awful!" And again Grace hid her face on Sam's shoulder.

"Well, it served him right if he got hurt and if his runabout was ruined," was the youth's comment. He drew Grace closer to him than ever. "Then you didn't really care for him?" he whispered.

"Oh, Sam, Sam! how can you ask such a question?" she murmured.

"Because I didn't know. I thought—— You see, he—he is a millionaire, and——"

"Why, Sam Rover! do you think that money would make any difference to me?" and now she raised her face to look him full in the eyes.

"I am mighty glad to know it hasn't made any difference," he returned quickly; and then caught and held her tight once more.

"I suppose you young men are goin' back to help the fellow with his busted machine," remarked Mr. Akerson to Tom.

"I—I suppose so," returned Tom, slowly, and then looked toward Sam and Grace.

"Oh, I don't want to go back!" cried the girl,

quickly. "I want to return to the hotel in Larkinburg."

"All right, I'll take you back, Grace," answered Sam. "If you say so, we'll leave Waltham right where he is."

"I think it would be the right thing to do, Sam, under ordinary circumstances," was the reply. "But then we mustn't forget about Ada. She will be greatly worried if I come back and let her know that we left her brother out here on the open road with a broken machine."

"I'll tell you what we'll do, Grace. You stay here and Tom and I will go down and see what Waltham has got to say for himself." He turned to the people of the house. "She can stay here a little longer, can't she? We'll make it all right with you."

"Certainly she can stay," answered Mr. Akerson. "And there won't be anything to pay outside of the telephone toll, and that's only twenty cents."

"Please don't stay too long," implored Grace, as the two Rovers hurried away.

"Not a minute longer than is necessary," returned Sam.

On the way down the hill to where the accident had occurred Sam gave his brother the par-

ticulars of the affair, not mincing matters so far as it concerned Chester Waltham.

"I was thinking that that was about the way it would turn out," was Tom's dry comment. "With so much money, Waltham thinks he can do about as he pleases. I reckon now, Sam, you are sorry you didn't talk to Grace before."

"I sure am, Tom!" was the reply, and Sam's tones showed what a weight had been taken from his heart. "I'm going to fix it up with Grace before another twenty-four hours pass."

"That's the way to talk, boy! Go to it! I wish you every success!" and Tom clapped his brother on the shoulder affectionately.

Even though all the lights were out, it did not take the two Rovers long to locate the disabled runabout, which rested among some stones on the side of the highway. As Grace had stated, the wind-shield was a mass of smashed glass, and the front axle had broken close to the left wheel.

"They can certainly be thankful they didn't break their necks," was Tom's comment, as he walked around the wreck.

"Waltham doesn't seem to be anywhere around here," returned Sam. "Wonder where he went to?"

Both looked up and down the highway, and

presently saw a figure approaching from down the road. It proved to be Chester Waltham. He was capless and walked with a limp.

"Hello! Who are you?" challenged the young millionaire, and then as he drew closer he added: "Oh, the Rovers, eh? Did Grace get you on the 'phone?"

"She did," answered Sam, and then added sharply: "You've made a nice mess of it here, haven't you?"

"Say, I don't want any such talk from you," blustered the rich young man. Evidently he was in far from a good humor.

"I'll say what I please, Waltham, without asking your permission," continued the youngest Rover. "You had no right to bring Miss Laning away out here against her wishes. It was a contemptible thing to do."

"You talk as if you were my master," retorted Chester Waltham. "This isn't any of your affair and you keep out of it."

"We are perfectly willing to keep out of it if you say so, Waltham," broke in Tom. "We came down here merely to see if we could help you in any way. But I see your front axle is broken, and you will have to get the garage people to help you out with that."

"Where's Grace?" asked the young million-

aire. The subject of the broken-down runabout did not seem to interest him.

"She is up at the farmhouse on the hill," answered Tom.

"And we are going to take her back to the Larkinburg hotel in our auto," added Sam.

"Oh, all right, then, go ahead and do it."

"Do you want to ride with us?" questioned Tom.

"I don't know that I do. I'll stay here and take care of my runabout. If you'll tell my sister that I'm all right, that is all I want."

"Very well, just as you say," answered Tom. He took his brother by the arm. "Come on, Sam, there is no use of wasting time here."

"I'll be with you in a minute, Tom," was the younger brother's reply. "You go on ahead, I want to say just a few words more to Waltham."

"No use of your getting into a fight, Sam," returned Tom in a low voice.

"There won't be any fight unless he starts it."

Tom walked slowly up the road, and Sam turned back to where Chester Waltham had settled himself on the mud-guard of the broken-down runabout.

"See here, Waltham, I want to say a few words more to you," began Sam, and his tone of voice was such that the young millionaire

leaped at once to his feet. "I want to warn you about how you treat Miss Laning in the future."

"To warn me!" repeated Chester Waltham, not knowing what else to say.

"Exactly! Up at the farmhouse she told me all of what took place between you. She was all unstrung and quite hysterical. Now this won't do at all, and I want you to know it. After this if you are going to travel with us you've got to act the gentleman and treat her like a lady."

"Humph!"

"No 'humph' about it. I mean just what I say. If you don't behave yourself and don't treat her like a lady I'll—I'll——"

"Well, what will you do?" sneered Chester Waltham.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," and now Sam shook his finger in the young millionaire's face. "I'll give you the soundest thrashing you ever had in your life!"

"Ah! do you mean to threaten me?"

"I certainly do."

"When it comes to a thrashing, maybe two can play at that game," observed the young millionaire; but it was plainly to be seen that Sam's decided stand had disconcerted him.

"All right, Waltham, I'll be ready for you. But remember what I said. We came out here

to have a good time, and I am not going to allow you to spoil it for Miss Laning or for anybody else."

"Humph! you make me tired," sneered the rich young man. "Go on, I don't want to be bothered with you any longer. The whole bunch of you is too namby-pamby for me. I think my sister and I could have a much better time if we weren't with you."

"As far as you personally are concerned, you can't leave us any too quickly to suit me," returned Sam.

"Is that so? Well, I guess you can call it off then so far as my sister and I are concerned. But if you think, Rover, that you have seen the last of this affair you are mistaken," went on the young millionaire, pointedly. "You think you are going to run things to suit yourself, don't you? Well, I'll put a spoke in your wheel—a spoke that you never dreamed of! You just wait and see!" and then Chester Waltham turned back and sat down once more on his wrecked runabout, leaving Sam to walk up the road to rejoin Tom in a very thoughtful mood.

CHAPTER XXVII

A TELEGRAM FROM NEW YORK

It was not until the small hours of the morning that the two Rovers and Grace returned to the hotel in Larkinburg. They found Dick and his wife and Nellie anxiously awaiting their return.

"Oh! I am so glad that you weren't hurt," cried Nellie, as she embraced her sister. "I was so worried," and she hugged her again and again.

"You can rest assured, Nellie, that I'll never go out with Chester Waltham again! Never!" cried Grace. "Come on, I am going to my room. Good-night, everybody," she called back, and in another moment had retired from their view, followed by her sister.

"Why, Sam! what does it mean?" cried Dora, as she looked on in bewilderment.

"It means that Chester Waltham ought to have had a good thrashing," declared the youngest Rover; and then he and Tom told of what had occurred.

"I guess it will be a good job done if we part

company with the Walthams," remarked Dick, after the subject had been discussed for some time. "He is not of our class, even if he has money."

"I feel rather sorry for his sister," added Dora. "Although once in a while she shows the same haughtiness of manner that Chester displays. It's too bad, too, for they might be really nice company."

With so much excitement going on, it was small wonder that the Rover party did not come downstairs that morning until quite late. Sam was the first to show himself, he being anxious to know how Grace had fared.

"Here is a letter for your brother, Mr. Rover," said the clerk at the desk, when Sam approached him. "It was left here by that Mr. Waltham."

"Hand it over," returned the youth, and then added: "Did Mr. Waltham bring his wrecked runabout to the garage here?"

"No, sir, he just came here, got his sister, paid his bill, and went off."

"Oh, I see." Sam could not help but show his surprise. "I'll take this letter to my brother," he added, and hurried off.

The communication was a short one, yet the Rovers and the others read it with interest. In

it Chester Waltham said that in consideration of the way he had been treated by some members of the party he considered it advisable for his sister and himself to continue their tour separately. He added that he trusted Miss Laning did not feel any ill effects because of the breakdown on the road.

"And just to think that Ada went off without saying good-bye!" cried Grace, when she saw the letter. "I didn't think she would be quite so mean as that."

"Probably she took her brother's part. She usually did," returned her sister. "Well, I think we are well rid of them."

"So do I," put in Tom. "Personally I don't care if we never see them again."

"He said he was going to put a spoke in our wheel," mused Sam. "I wonder if he'll dare to do anything to harm us?"

"Oh, it's likely he was talking through his hat," returned Dick; but for once the oldest Rover was mistaken.

Now that our friends were by themselves there seemed to be a general air of relief. The only one of the party who was rather quiet was Grace, but Sam did everything he could to make it pleasant for her, and before nightfall she was as jolly as ever.

The run during that day was through a particularly beautiful section of the country, and about one o'clock they stopped in a grove and partook of a lunch which had been put up for them at the Larkinburg hotel. Then they moved forward once again, with Dick and Tom at the steering wheels of the cars.

"Still seventy-three miles to go if we want to make Etoria to-day," announced Dick, after consulting the guide book. "I'm afraid that will be quite a ride for you ladies," he added, turning to Mrs. Stanhope and Mrs. Laning.

"Oh, yes, let us go on to Etoria by all means," pleaded Sam.

"Any particular reason for going to that city?" asked Tom, quickly.

"Yes, I've got a reason, but I'm not going to tell you," returned his younger brother. And then, as both Dick and Tom looked at him questioningly, he blushed and turned away.

"Oh, go ahead. I think I can stand it," said Mrs. Stanhope, with a smile.

"I am getting used to traveling," declared Mrs. Laning. "It's much more comfortable than I at first supposed it would be."

Nightfall found them still ten miles from Etoria and Dick asked the others if they wished to stop anywhere along the way for supper. All

declared, however, that they would rather keep on until the city was reached.

"They tell me that they have got a dandy hotel there—something new," said Sam. "We ought to get first-class accommodations there."

Etoria was a city of some fifty thousand inhabitants, with a long main street brightly lighted up. The new hotel was opposite a beautiful public park, an ideal location. Sam seemed to be in unusual haste to finish his supper, and immediately it was over he asked Grace if she would not take a walk with him.

"We are going to do up the town, so don't worry if we get back a little late," he told Mrs. Laning, and then whispered something in her ear which made her smile and gaze at him fondly.

They pursued their way along the main street of the town, and while doing so the youngest Rover kept his eyes on the various shops that were passed. At last they came to a large jewelry establishment and here he brought the girl to a halt.

"It's open!" he cried. "That's what I call luck! I was afraid they would all be closed."

Grace looked at the store, and at the display of jewelry in the window, and then looked at Sam.

"I guess you know what it's going to be,

Grace," he said rather tenderly, and looked her full in the eyes. "I want you to have just as good a one as Dora or Nellie."

"Oh, Sam! I—I don't understand," she stammered.

"It's an engagement ring. We are going in here and see what sort of rings this man has got. It looks like a reliable place."

"Oh, Sam!" and now, blushing deeply, Grace clung to his arm. "An engagement ring?"

"Sure! You ought to have had it long ago, then maybe we wouldn't have had any trouble."

"There wasn't any trouble, Sam—at least, I didn't make any trouble," she repeated; and then, as he caught her arm and dragged her into the shop, she murmured: "Oh, I—I feel so funny to go into a store for a thing like that! Don't you think I had better wait outside?"

"You can if you want to, after the jeweler has measured your finger, Grace. But what's the use of being so backward? As soon as we get back home you are going to be Mrs. Sam Rover, so you might as well get used to such things first as last."

Fortunately for the young couple it was a very elderly man—quite fatherly in appearance—who came to wait on them.

"A diamond ring?" he queried. "Why, cer-

tainly, I'll be pleased to show everything we have;" and then he measured Grace's finger, and brought forth several trays of glittering gems.

Grace would have been satisfied with almost any of the rings, but Sam was rather critical and insisted upon obtaining a beautiful blue-white diamond which was almost the counterpart of the stone Dick had bestowed upon Dora.

"Now you've got to promise to have this engraved by eight o'clock to-morrow morning," said the youngest Rover to the jeweler. "We are on an automobile tour and we can't wait any longer than that." And thereupon the shopkeeper promised that the order should be duly filled.

"Oh, Sam, how extravagant you are!" murmured Grace, when the pair were returning to the hotel. "Why, that ring cost a dreadful lot of money." Her eyes were shining like stars.

"It isn't a bit too good for such a girl as you," he declared stoutly, and then gave her hand a squeeze that meant a great deal.

When they left Etoria the next morning Sam had the engagement ring tucked safely away in his pocket. He had confided in Dick, and the oldest Rover managed it so that that noon they stopped at a large country hotel and obtained the use of a private dining-room. This, Sam had

decorated with flowers, and just before the meal commenced he slipped the engagement ring upon Grace's finger.

"Oh, Sam! Oh, Grace!" shrieked Nellie when she saw the sparkling circlet on her sister's finger.

"Oh! so that's what's going on, is it?" cried Dora, joyfully. "Grace, allow me to congratulate you," and then she kissed the girl and immediately afterward kissed Sam. Numerous other kisses and handshakes followed, and for the time being Sam and Grace were the happiest young people in the world.

"Let us send telegrams home, announcing the affair," suggested the youngest Rover, after the meal was at an end. "I know dad, as well as Aunt Martha and Uncle Randolph, will be glad to hear of it."

The telegrams were quickly prepared and sent off. In the messages Sam notified those at home where the touring party would be for the next ten days.

After that several days slipped by quickly. The tourists had covered a good many miles and were now approaching the Mississippi River. The weather had been ideal, and not a single puncture or blowout had come to cause them trouble. Sam and Grace were much to-

gether, and, as the youngest Rover declared, "were having the time of their lives."

"It's queer I don't get more word from New York," remarked Dick one evening, when they had reached a city which I shall call Pemberton. "Dad acknowledged that telegram of Sam's, but he didn't say a word about that Lansing deal or anything about the Bruno bonds."

"Well, let us hope that no news is good news," returned Tom. "Anyway, I'm not going to worry until I know there is something to worry about."

That evening came word from Valley Brook, stating that everything was going along well at the farm and that Mr. Anderson Rover was confining himself closely to business in New York.

The Mississippi was crossed, and then the tourists headed in the direction of Colorado Springs. It was their intention to make the Springs the turning point of the trip, with a side trip by the cog railway to Pike's Peak. They would return by the way of Denver. Some days later found them in Topeka, where they had decided to rest up for a day or two. During that time only one short telegram had come from Mr. Anderson Rover, stating that the Bruno bonds had been sold at a fair profit, but that the Lansing deal was still uncertain.

"We stand to win or lose quite a lot of money on that Lansing deal," Dick explained to Sam. "It's rather a peculiar affair. The whole thing is being engineered by a Wall Street syndicate."

On the morning of the second day in Topeka, when Sam and Grace and some of the others had gone shopping, Dick heard one of the bell-boys call his name.

"Telegram," he said to Tom. "I hope this is from dad and that it contains good news."

The telegram proved to be what is known as a Night Letter, and its contents caused the two Rovers much astonishment. The communication ran as follows:

"Have been following up the Lansing deal closely. Affairs are getting rather clouded and I am afraid we may lose out. A new opposition has appeared, a combination headed by your former friend, Waltham. He is still in the West but his agents are working against us. He has also bought controlling interest in the Haverford deal. Evidently means to hit us as hard as possible. Will know more in a day or two and will let you know at once of any change in affairs.

"ANDERSON ROVER."

CHAPTER XXVIII

CLOUDBURST AND FLOOD

"I SEE it!" cried Tom. "That's the spoke Chester Waltham told Sam he would put in our wheel."

"I guess you are right," returned his older brother. "Evidently Waltham is a meaner fellow than I took him to be. Just because Grace would not put up with his ungentlemanly attentions he evidently is going to do what he can to make trouble for us."

"I don't understand what dad means by the Haverford deal," went on Tom, as he studied the telegram. "I thought that deal was closed long ago."

"They thought of closing it, Tom, but at the last moment something went wrong and the men who were going into the matter withdrew. That put a large part of the burden on our shoulders. We have at least forty thousand dollars invested in it. Now, if Waltham has bought a controlling interest, as dad says, he will be able to swing it

any way he pleases, just as he may be able to swing the Lansing deal, too."

"How much money have we got locked up in that? The last I heard it was only about eight thousand dollars."

"When I left, dad said he expected to put in another twelve thousand, which would make a total of twenty thousand dollars, Tom."

"Phew! Then that makes a grand total of sixty thousand dollars in the two deals. Chester Waltham must have a lot of loose money, if he can jump into deals as big as those are at a moment's notice."

"Oh, a young millionaire like Waltham can get hold of cash whenever he wants it," answered Dick. He ran his hand through his hair thoughtfully. "This looks bad to me. Perhaps I had better take a train back to New York without delay."

"Oh, if you did that it would spoil the trip for Dora," protested his brother.

"It's better to spoil the trip than to let Chester Waltham get the better of us."

"Why not send a telegram asking if it will do any good for you to come home?" questioned Tom. And after a little discussion Dick decided to do this, and the telegram was sent without delay. A few hours later word came back that

if Dick was needed his father would send for him.

The stay in Topeka was extended to the best part of a week, for that night a furious rainstorm set in which lasted two days. The downpour was unusually heavy, and as a consequence many of the outlying roads became well-nigh impassable.

During the last day of the storm Sam received a long letter from Songbird in which the would-be poet told of how he was working to make his way in the world and also earn some money that he might pay back the amount lost by Mr. Sanderson. He added that so far the authorities had been unable to find any further trace of Blackie Crowden.

"It's too bad!" was Sam's comment, after he had read this communication. "Poor Songbird! I suppose he feels as bad as ever over the loss of that money."

At last the sun once more broke through the clouds and the journey of the tourists was resumed. Close to the city the roads were in fairly good condition, but farther out they soon found evidences of the tremendous downpour of the days before. Deep gullies had been cut here and there, and occasionally they came across washed-out trees and brushwood.

"We'll have to take it a bit slowly, especially after dark," remarked Dick.

When they passed over some of the rivers they found the rushing waters reached almost to the flooring of the bridges; and on the second day out they found one bridge swept completely away, so that they had to make a detour of many miles to gain another crossing.

"What a tremendous loss to some of these farmers," remarked Mrs. Laning, as they rolled past numerous cornfields where the stalks had been swept down and covered with mud. "I am glad to say we never had anything like this at Cedarville."

"And we never had anything like it at Valley Brook either," returned Dick. "This is the worst washout I ever saw."

At noon they stopped at a small town for dinner and there they heard numerous reports concerning the storm. In one place it had taken away a barn and a cowshed and in another it had undermined the foundations of several houses.

"The water up to Hickyville was three feet deep in the street," said one man at the hotel. "The folks had to rescue people by boats and rafts. One man had four cows drowned, and up at Ganey Point a man lost all his pigs and two horses."

The party had scarcely left that town when it began to rain again. The downpour, however,

was for a time so light that they did not think it worth while to stop or to turn back.

"We'll put the tops up," said Tom, "and maybe in a little while the clouds will blow away."

But Tom's hopes were doomed to disappointment. The downpour was comparatively light for about an hour, but then, just as they were passing through a patch of timber, it suddenly came on with great fury.

"Great Scott!" burst out Sam, as a gust of wind drove the rain under the automobile tops. "We'll have to put down the side curtains."

"Right you are!" answered Dick; and then the machines were halted and all the curtains were lowered and fastened. But even this did not protect them entirely, for the wind drove the rain in between the numerous cracks of the covering.

"How many miles to the next stopping place?" queried Nellie.

"About thirty," answered Tom. "That is, if we go as far as we calculated to when we left this morning."

"Oh, I don't see how we are going to make thirty miles more in such a storm as this!" cried her sister.

"We'll be lucky to make any kind of stopping place," announced Dick, grimly. "Just listen to that!"

There was a wild roaring of wind outside, and then came a flash of lightning followed by a deafening clap of thunder.

"Oh! Oh!" came in a shriek from the girls; and involuntarily they placed their hands to their ears.

"Richard, do you think it is safe to stay under the trees in such a storm as this?" questioned Mrs. Stanhope, fearfully.

Before Dick could reply to this question there came more lightning and thunder, and then a crash in the woods as a big tree was laid low.

"Oh, dear! Listen!" cried Nellie. "Suppose one of the trees should come down on the autos!"

"That is what I was afraid of," added her mother. "I think we had better get out of here."

"All right, if you say so," answered Dick. "I was only thinking about the awful wind. It's going to hit us pretty hard when we get out on the open road."

The automobiles had drawn up side by side, so that those in one machine could converse with those in the other. Now Dick started up one of the touring cars and was followed a minute later by Tom, at the wheel of the other automobile.

Once in the open air, those in the machines realized how furiously the wind was blowing and

how heavily the rain was descending. The automobiles fairly shook and shivered in the blasts, and despite their efforts to keep themselves dry all those in the automobiles were speedily drenched. The downpour was so heavy that the landscape on all sides was completely blotted out.

"Oh, Dick! what in the world shall we do?" gasped Dora, and it was plainly to be seen that she was badly frightened.

"I'd turn in somewhere if I only knew where," answered her husband, trying his best to peer through the rain-spattered wind-shield. "I don't see anything like a house anywhere around, do you?"

"No, I can't see a thing."

Dick was running along cautiously, and now, of a sudden, he put on the brakes. Just ahead of him had appeared a flood of water, and how deep it was there was no telling.

"Listen!" cried Mrs. Stanhope, when the automobile had come to a standstill. "Did I hear somebody calling?"

Scarcely had she spoken when there came another vivid flash of lightning followed by more thunder, and then a downpour heavier than ever. As the lightning flashed out Dick was surprised to see a girl splashing through the water on the road and running toward them.

"Look! Look!" he ejaculated. "Unless I am mistaken it's Ada Waltham!"

"It is! It is!" exclaimed Dora. "What in the world is she doing out alone in such a downpour as this!"

As the girl on the road came closer to the touring car Dick threw up one of the curtains, opened the door, and sprang out to meet her.

"Oh, Mr. Rover!" gasped Ada Waltham, "is it really you? How fortunate! Won't you please help me?"

"What's wrong?" he demanded quickly.

"Chester! He's lost!"

"Lost! Where?"

"He tried to cross the river yonder in the storm, and the bridge broke and let the automobile down. I managed to save myself and jumped ashore, but he was carried off by the torrent." The rich girl clasped her hands nervously. "Oh, please save him, Mr. Rover! Please do!"

By this time the second automobile had come up, and Dick waved to Tom to stop. Seeing that something was wrong, Tom quickly alighted, followed by Sam.

"What's wrong?" came from both of the new arrivals, as they gazed at Ada Waltham in astonishment.

"Miss Waltham says her brother is lost—that

he has been carried off in the flood of yonder river," answered Dick.

"Oh, please hurry!" burst out the girl eagerly. "Please hurry, or it will be too late! I don't think Chester can swim."

"All right, we'll tell the others where we are going and then we'll do what we can," answered Dick. "But if that flood is very strong we may have——"

Dick was unable to finish his speech. Just then there came more lightning followed by a deafening crash of thunder. Then the very heavens seemed to open, to let down a torrent of water which seemed to fairly engulf them.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" came from the women and the girls. "Oh! what a terrible storm!"

"It is a cloudburst! That's what it is!" gasped Sam.

"You're right!" ejaculated Tom. "Look! See how the water in the river is rising! It's a cloudburst and a flood!"

Tom was right—there had been a cloudburst, but fortunately not directly over the heads of our friends, otherwise they might have perished in the terrible downpour which immediately followed. The catastrophe had occurred at a point about a mile farther up the river, and now the waters from this flood were coming down with

great swiftness and rising higher and higher every instant.

"We've got to get out of here," was Sam's comment. Already they were standing in water up to their ankles. "We've got to find higher ground."

"Oh, Sam! Sam! please don't let my brother drown!" pleaded Ada Waltham, catching him by the arm.

"We'll do what we can to save him, Ada, but we've got to save ourselves first," he answered.

"See! there is a little hill ahead," came from Dick, as he did his best to look through the rain, which was coming down as heavily as ever. "Let us run to the top of the rise, then we'll be in less danger from the flood if the river gets much higher." He turned to the distracted girl. "Come, you had better go with us, then we will see what we can do for your brother."

"Oh, Dick! Dick! If you don't hurry we'll be swept away, sure!" cried Dora, and then made room so that Ada might get in beside her.

In a moment more the three Rovers had re-entered the touring cars, and then the machines were sent forward through the water, which was now nearly a foot deep on the roadway.

"Oh! I never saw such a storm in my life," was Mrs. Laning's comment.

"If only we get out of this alive!" breathed Mrs. Stanhope. Being naturally a very nervous woman, she was on the verge of a collapse.

Running with care through the swirling water that covered the roadway, they at length reached a rise of ground several feet above the flood. Here they stopped at the highest point they could gain, bringing the machines side by side.

When the storm had started in earnest the three Rovers had donned their raincoats. Now, with rain caps pulled well down over their heads, they once more alighted.

"If you can show us where your auto went into the river we'll see if we can locate your brother," announced Dick to Ada Waltham. "Maybe he got out and is walking somewhere around here," he added, by way of encouragement.

"Oh, dear! I'm so nervous I can scarcely stand!" gasped the girl, and when she reached the ground they had to support her.

Splashing along through the water that covered the roadway, they slowly progressed until they gained a point where the youths felt it would be impossible for Ada Waltham to go any farther.

"There is what is left of the bridge over yonder," cried the girl, pointing with her hand.

The Rovers looked in that direction and saw

a few sticks of timber sticking out of the swirling waters, which were running down stream as turbulently as ever.

"I don't think there is any use of looking for Chester around that bridge," was Tom's remark. "Most likely he was carried down stream—how far there is no telling. I think the best thing we can do is to take a look farther down."

"That is just my opinion," returned his older brother. "I think you had better return to the autos. It won't do any good for you to remain out in this storm," he continued to the girl.

When the party got back to the cars they found a farmer and his grown son standing by the machines.

"I was just telling the ladies you had better run your automobiles up to my place," said the farmer. "It's about ten or fifteen feet higher than this, and, consequently, just so much safer. Besides, the ladies can come into the house."

"We want to find this young lady's brother. He was swept off the bridge yonder," returned Dick.

"So the ladies were telling me," returned James Barlow. "You come up to the house, and I'll go out with you. We've got a big rowboat that may come in handy. Say! ain't this some storm? Worst let-down I've ever seen in these parts."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE RESCUE ON THE RIVER

It did not take long to run the automobiles down the road and up a side lane leading to the farmer's house. Here the ladies got out, and then the machines were placed in a barn.

"You will do all you can to find my brother?" wailed Ada Waltham, anxiously.

"Yes, we'll do our level best," answered Dick; and Tom and Sam said practically the same.

The Rovers consulted with Mr. Barlow and his son, James, and all five walked down as close to the edge of the river as the effects of the cloudburst would allow. They saw bushes, trees, and parts of buildings coming down the swiftly-flowing stream, the waters of which were now thick with mud.

"Here is my rowboat," announced the farmer, pointing to where the craft was tied fast to a large tree. "You can use it if you want to, but it looks to me like rather a hopeless matter to try to do anything while the river is raging like this.

You had better wait until it calms down a little."

"The trouble of it is, it may then be too late," answered Tom. He looked at his brothers. "I think we can manage it," he added.

The matter was discussed for fully a quarter of an hour, and during that time the storm seemed to let up a little. The first awful effects of the cloudburst were passing, and the water was going down slowly but surely.

"We'll try it," announced Dick, at last. "If we can't manage the rowboat we'll come ashore farther down the stream."

The craft was a substantial one, and there were two pairs of oars, and to these James Barlow added a sweep to be used as a rudder. Then the three Rovers embarked, Tom and Sam to do the rowing and the other brother to guide the craft. It was hard, dangerous work, as they realized as soon as they struck the current of the swollen stream. They were sent along pell-mell, and it was all they could do to keep themselves from crashing into one object or another on the way.

"Look out, or you'll get upset!" yelled James Barlow to them, and then his voice was drowned out in the rushing and roaring of the elements around them.

A half hour passed—which to the Rovers

just then seemed almost an age. During that time the three kept their eyes wide open for a possible sight of Chester Waltham or anybody else who might have been carried away by the flood.

"There is somebody!" suddenly called out Dick. "A man caught in a tree!"

"Is it Waltham?" demanded Tom, quickly.

"I can't make out. He is crouched in a heap on some limbs and is waving frantically for us."

Not without additional peril did the Rovers turn the rowboat across the river, for the tree in which the man was crouching was on the shore opposite to that from which they had embarked.

"Hello! there are two fellows in the tree!" announced Tom, as they drew closer.

The second man crouched behind the trunk, so that they had not at first been able to see him.

"Help! Help!" came from the fellow who had been waving so frantically to them. And now, as they drew still closer, they saw that the individual was Chester Waltham. The young millionaire was capless and coatless, and his face and hands were much scratched.

"We're in luck, that's sure," was Tom's comment, in a low voice.

"And I'm glad on his sister's account," added Sam.

"When we bring the boat up beside the tree you

lower yourself into it, Waltham," directed Dick. "But be careful how you do it or we'll upset. The current here is very swift."

"Yes, yes, I'll be careful," answered the young millionaire in a voice which trembled so that he could scarcely speak. He was, of course, much surprised to discover that it was the Rovers who had come to his assistance.

He was so exhausted that to get out of the tree in safety was all but impossible, and finally Dick had to assist him while Tom and Sam did all they could to hold the rowboat in position.

"It's fine of you to come for me!" panted Chester Waltham, when he found himself safe in the rowboat. Di-did my si-sister get you, or what?"

"Yes, she escaped and told us of your plight," answered Dick, briefly.

"Good for Ada! Now get me safe on shore once more and I'll pay you handsomely for your trouble."

"You won't have to pay us a cent, Waltham," was Sam's quick reply. "Just sit still so that the boat doesn't go over."

"Can I help you in any way?"

"No. Sit still, that's all," came from Tom, sharply. The idea of having Waltham speak of paying them at such a time disgusted him.

In the meantime the second fellow in the tree

had moved down a limb or two with the idea of following Waltham into the rowboat. But now, as he looked at the three Rovers, he suddenly drew back.

"Hi there! don't you want to come with us?" cried Dick, considerably astonished over the man's actions.

To this the individual in the tree made no reply. He kept behind the trunk and finally waved a hand as if to motion them away.

"Say! is that fellow crazy?" questioned Sam.

"He must be," was Tom's comment. He turned to Chester Waltham. "Do you know him!"

"No, he's a stranger to me. I tried to speak to him, but he was so scared and cold from the ducking he got he did nothing but chatter, so I couldn't understand him."

"See here, it's foolish to stay up there," called out Dick. "Come on down and we'll take you ashore."

"D-do-don't want to g-g-go," came the stuttered-out reply. "G-go-wheep!" came in a funny little whistle. "G-g-go a-away!"

"Well, of all the scared fellows——" commenced Tom.

"Great Scott! I wonder if that fellow can be Blackie Crowden!" ejaculated Sam.

"G-g-go a-wa-way!" stuttered the man in the

tree, and then tried to say something more, but the words only ended in a strange little whistle.

"Sam, do you really think it can be the fellow who robbed Songbird?" demanded Dick. "What would he be doing away out here?"

"Why, Blackie Crowden came from Denver or Colorado Springs," announced the youngest Rover. "Remember, we are not so many miles away from those places." He raised his voice. "You come down out of there, Crowden. We know you and we want you."

At this command the man in the tree seemed much disturbed. He tried to speak, but because of his natural stutter and his terror of the situation through which he was passing, his effort was a failure.

"If you don't come down, we'll haul you down," ordered Dick, finally, and then, after a little more urging, the fellow finally consented to come out of the tree, and dropped into the rowboat.

"Blackie Crowden, as sure as fate!" murmured Sam, as soon as he got a good look at the fellow's features. "Well, if this isn't luck!"

"Evidently you know this fellow," came from Chester Waltham, curiously.

"We sure do!" declared Sam. "He's the man who knocked our college chum, John Powell,

down on the road near Ashton and robbed him of four thousand dollars."

"I di-didn't r-r-rob any bo-body," stuttered Blackie Crowden. "It's all a mi-mis-mis-mista-ta-take!" and he ended with his usual queer whistle.

"We'll see about that later, Crowden," put in Dick, sternly. "Now you sit perfectly still or else maybe you'll go overboard and be drowned."

It would be difficult to describe the joy with which Ada Waltham greeted her brother on his safe return. She flew into his arms and, as wet as he was, hugged him over and over again.

"Oh! I was so afraid you'd be drowned, Chester!" and then she added quickly: "How grand it was for the Rovers to go to your assistance!"

"It certainly was very fine of them to do it," returned the young millionaire. And now it must be admitted that he seemed very much disturbed in mind. "I'm going to pay them back, you see if I don't," he added, after a thoughtful pause.

Blackie Crowden had done his best to make them believe that he was not guilty of the attack upon Songbird, but the Rovers would not listen to this, and put him through such a grilling that finally he broke down and confessed all.

"I wouldn't have done the deed at all if it hadn't been that I was worried over another mat-

ter," he said amid much stuttering and whistling. "I ain't a bad man naturally, even though I do drink and gamble a little. If it hadn't been for a lawyer named Belright Fogg I would never have robbed the young man."

"Belright Fogg!" came from the Rovers.

"What has that shyster lawyer to do with it?" added Sam.

"Do you know he is a shyster lawyer?"

"We sure do!" added Tom, promptly.

"Then you will understand me when I tell you how it was. Some time ago I was mixed up in a land transaction. It is a long story, and all I need to tell you is that Belright Fogg was in it, too. I did some things that I oughtn't to, and that gave Fogg a hold on me. Finally he claimed that I owed him three hundred dollars, and he said if I didn't pay up he would make it hot for me and maybe land me in jail. That got me scared and I said I'd get the money somehow.

"Then by accident I saw Powell get the money from the bank, and I followed him on horseback, passed him, and took the cash, as you know. As soon as the deed was done I was sorry for it, but then it was too late," stuttered Blackie Crowden, and hung his head.

"And did you go to Belright Fogg and give him the three hundred dollars?" queried Sam.

"Yes. I met him in Leadenfield, at a road house kept by a Frenchman named Bissette."

"Then I was right after all!" cried Sam. "I accused Fogg of meeting you, but he denied it."

"Well, he got the three hundred all right enough," stuttered Crowden.

"And how was it you tried to keep out of our sight in that flood?" asked Sam curiously. "Did you know us?"

"I knew you—saw you follow me to the depot at Dentonville. You thought I got on that train. But I didn't—I took a night freight."

"I see. That is why the authorities didn't spot you."

"That's it. But you were asking about Fogg," continued Blackie Crowden, speculatively.

"And did he know you had stolen the money?" demanded Dick, sharply.

"I'm pretty sure he did, although he didn't ask any questions. He knew about the robbery, and he knew well enough that I didn't have any three hundred dollars of my own to give him."

"What did you do with the rest of the money, Crowden? I hope you didn't spend it?" questioned Sam, anxiously.

"Spend it!" came in a bitter stutter from the criminal. "I didn't get any chance to spend it. All I had was two hundred dollars!"

"Then what became of the other thirty-five hundred?" questioned Tom.

"It's in a room at the Ashton hotel, unless somebody found it and stole it."

"At the Ashton hotel!" cried Sam.

"That's it. You see, after I met Fogg I stopped at Ashton for one night and put up at the old hotel on the Cheesley turnpike. I hid the money in an out-of-the-way corner of a clothes closet, because I didn't want to carry it on my person. Then, when I was on the street, I heard that you were on my trail, and I got scared and I was afraid to go back to the hotel to get it."

"Can you remember what room it was?" queried Tom.

"Yes, it was a back room—number twenty-two. I put the money in a hole in the wall back of an upper shelf."

"We had better notify the authorities at Ashton of this," said Tom to his brothers.

"Let us telegraph to Songbird and tell him to go to Ashton," suggested Sam. "If the money is there, Songbird ought to have the fun of getting it and returning it to Mr. Sanderson."

"All right, let's do it!" cried Dick; and so the matter was arranged.

CHAPTER XXX

MRS. SAM ROVER—CONCLUSION

"WELL, that's good news and I'm mighty glad to hear it."

It was Dick who spoke, three days after the incidents recorded in the last chapter. Our friends had been staying at the farmhouse of Mr. Barlow. Blackie Crowden had been turned over to the local authorities, the oldest Rover making the charge against him. Crowden had pleaded for mercy, but the boys, while sympathizing with him, had thought it best to let the law take its course. Chester Waltham and his sister had also remained at the farmhouse, which fortunately was a large one, so that the whole party was not particularly crowded for room.

The rescue of the young millionaire from the river had worked wonders, and he was now heartily ashamed of himself, not only for the way he had treated Grace but also on account of the instructions he had sent to his agents in Wall Street.

"You can rest assured, Mr. Rover, that my

opposition to your plans in New York will be withdrawn," he said to Dick. "I am going to telegraph to my agents as soon as I get a chance. And I want you and your brothers to understand that I appreciate thoroughly your goodness in coming to my rescue. It was a splendid thing to do. I am not going to insult you by offering you any reward—all I can say is that I thank you from the bottom of my heart." And that evening Chester Waltham and his sister had taken their departure, stating that the accident at the bridge had ended their idea of touring farther, and that they were going to take the first train they could get for the East.

The thing that Dick called "good news" was a long "Night Letter" sent over the wires by Songbird. The former poet of Brill had received their message concerning Blackie Crowden, and also Belright Fogg, and had at once hurried to Ashton and to the hotel on the Cheesley turnpike. There, in room twenty-two, as mentioned by Crowden, he had found the package containing the thirty-five hundred dollars. Next he had called on Belright Fogg and had scared the shyster lawyer so completely that Fogg had returned the three hundred dollars received from Crowden with scarcely a protest. Then the happy youth had driven over to the Sanderson place. The

Sandersons had been surprised to see him and amazed to learn that he had recovered so large a portion of the stolen money.

"As I had already paid Mr. Sanderson one hundred dollars," wrote Songbird, "it made a total of thirty-nine hundred returned to him, and he told me that I need not bother about the other hundred. But I paid it just the same, for I had just been fortunate enough to sell six of my poems—two to a magazine and four to a weekly paper—for one hundred and sixty dollars.

"Of course we had a grand time, and Mr. Sanderson has forgiven everything. He and Minnie think you are mighty smart fellows, and I agree with them. Minnie and I have fixed matters all up between us, and we are the happiest couple you ever saw. I don't know how to thank you enough for what you have done for me, and all I can add is, God bless you, every one!"

"Good old Songbird!" murmured Sam, as he read the communication a second time. "I'll wager he feels a hundred per cent. better than he did."

"And to think he sold six of his poems!" commented Tom. "I shouldn't wonder if he thinks more of that than he does of getting the money back," he added, somewhat drily.

On the following day came another telegram, this time from Mr. Rover, stating that the opposition of the Waltham interests in Wall Street had been suddenly withdrawn. But he added that business matters in the metropolis were becoming more and more arduous for him, and he asked when Dick expected to get back.

"I'm afraid it's getting too much for dear, old dad," was Dick's comment, on perusing this message. "I think the best thing I can do is to get back and help him."

"Well, if you go back, I think I'll go back myself," said Tom. "Anyway, this tour seems to have come to a standstill, with so much rain."

"I'm willing to go back if you fellows say so," put in Sam.

"I'll wager he and Grace want to get ready for their wedding," remarked Tom, slily.

"That's just what we do," returned Sam, boldly. "We're going to be married early this fall, aren't we, Grace?" and he gazed fondly at the girl, who nodded, and then turned away to hide her blushes.

But the tour did not come to an end as quickly as might have been expected. On the day following it was such fair weather that they left the Barlow farm and started once more on their trip westward. Colorado Springs was soon gained,

and, passing on to Manitou, they left the automobiles, and took the cog railway to the summit of Pike's Peak. Then, on the day following, they motored up to Denver.

"We can ship our automobiles home by freight," said Dick, "and by returning by train we can be back in New York in no time."

A week later found the entire party once more in the East. While Dick and Tom settled down to help their father at the offices in Wall Street, the others returned to Valley Brook and to Cedarville, to prepare for the coming wedding.

"And where is it to be, Sam?" questioned Tom, when the brothers were on the point of parting.

"Oh, it can only be in one place," was Sam's answer.

"And I guess I know where that is," returned Tom, with a grin.

Both Dick and Tom had been married in the Cedarville Union Church, a little stone edifice covered with ivy, which was located not a great distance from the homes of the Lanings and the Stanhopes, and also Putnam Hall. As before, it was a question if the numerous guests who were expected to the ceremony would be able to get into the building. But both Grace and Sam said they would have to make the best of it.

As soon as the wedding invitations were issued, the presents began to come in, and they were fully as numerous and as costly as had been the gifts bestowed upon Dora and upon Nellie. From Mr. Rover came, as was to be expected, a bankbook containing an amount written therein which was the duplicate of that he had bestowed upon Dick and Dora and likewise upon Tom and Nellie.

"You can always depend on dad," was Sam's comment, his voice choking a little. "The best dad anybody ever had!"

"Indeed you are right!" answered the bride-to-be. "And I'm going to love him just as if he were my own father."

Sam's own present to his bride was a gold wrist-watch set in diamonds and pearls—a beautiful affair over which the happy girl went wild with delight.

At last came the eventful day, full of golden sunshine. All of the Rovers had arrived in Cedarville and were quartered at the hotel. Many other guests were at the Stanhope homestead and at the Laning farm, and still others—former cadets—had come back not only to attend the wedding but also to take another look at dear old Putnam Hall.

Among the old guard who had thus presented themselves were Fred Garrison, Larry Colby,

Bart Conners and Harry Blossom. Among those who had attended Brill were Stanley Browne, Spud Jackson, Bob Grimes and, of course, Songbird.

"I'm engaged to Minnie," whispered the latter to the Rovers at the first opportunity. "We are going to be married just as soon as my income will permit. And what do you think? I've sold four more poems—got eighty dollars for them," and his face beamed as they had never seen it shine before.

"I congratulate you, Songbird," returned Sam, heartily. "I certainly hope you get to be the best-known poet in the United States."

"Oh, I don't know about that. I am going to buckle down to business. My uncle thinks I am doing wonderfully well, and he says if I keep on he is going to give me a substantial increase in salary after the first of the year. I'm going to write verses just as a side issue."

As at the other weddings, the ceremony was set for high noon. Soon the guests began to arrive, and before long the old church was crowded to its capacity, with many standing up in the aisles and in the rear and even at the side windows, which were wide open.

Captain Putnam, in full uniform and looking a little grayer than ever, was there, and with him,

George Strong, his head assistant, with whom Sam had always been very friendly. There were also numerous girls there who had formerly attended Hope Seminary, and of these one was a flower girl and two were bridesmaids.

Sam's best man was his old Putnam Hall chum, Fred Garrison, while among the ushers were Songbird, Stanley, Spud, Bob, and some others of his former classmates.

Presently the organ pealed out and the minister appeared, followed a moment later by Sam. Then up the aisle came Grace on the arm of Mr. Laning, and daintily attired in white with a flowing veil beset with orange blossoms.

"Oh, how pretty she looks!" said more than one; and they spoke the truth, for Grace certainly made a beautiful bride.

The ceremony was a brief but solemn one, and then, as the organ pealed out joyously, the happy pair walked forth from the church, to enter an automobile which whirled them off to the Laning homestead. To that place they were followed by a great number of invited guests. An elaborate wedding dinner had been prepared, and an orchestra from the city had been hired, and all sat down to a feast of good things with music.

"We'll have to give them a send-off—same as they gave me," said Tom to his brother Dick,

while the festivities were at their height. "They'll be getting ready to go away soon."

"Sure! we'll give them a send-off," returned the oldest brother. "Come on, let us get busy."

Down at the barns an automobile was in readiness to take Sam and his bride away on their wedding trip. This car Dick and Tom and a number of others lost no time in decorating with white streamers and a placard which read: *We are on our wedding trip. Congratulate us.*

"Aren't you going to stay to have a dance?" questioned Nellie of her sister, a little later.

"Of course," answered Grace; and shortly after that she and Sam tripped around to the tuneful measures of a two-step. All of the young folks present joined in, the older folks looking on with much satisfaction.

"I can hardly believe it," declared old Aunt Martha, as she took off her spectacles to wipe her eyes. "Why, it don't seem no time since Sam was just a baby!"

The dancing continued for some time but then, of a sudden, came a cry from Dora:

"Where are Sam and Grace? I don't see them anywhere."

"They are gone! They have given us the slip!"

"No, they've gone upstairs. Wait here, and we'll give them a shower."

The young folks gathered in the hallway and out on the piazza, and a few minutes later Sam and Grace appeared, both ready for their tour. Then came a grand shower of rice and confetti, mingled with two or three old shoes, and in the midst of this the happy, laughing young couple escaped to the automobile which was now drawn up before the door. The chauffeur was ready for the start, and in an instant more the machine shot down the lane and out into the roadway.

"Good-bye! Good-bye and good luck to you!" was the cry.

"Good-bye, everybody!" came back from the touring car, and Sam and Grace stood up to wave their hands to those left behind. Then the touring car disappeared around a turn of the road, and they were gone.

And now let me add a few words more and thus bring to a close this long series of adventures in which the three Rover boys, Dick, Tom, and Sam, have played such an important part.

A number of years have passed and many changes of importance have occurred. Mr. Anderson Rover has retired from active participation in The Rover Company, and Dick is now the president, with Tom secretary and Sam treasurer. The concern is doing remarkably well and

all of the Rovers are reported to be wealthy. The father has returned to the farm at Valley Brook, where he lives in peace and comfort with Uncle Randolph and Aunt Martha, who, despite their years, are still in the best of health.

A year after Sam's marriage to Grace, Songbird Powell married Minnie Sanderson. The would-be poet has made quite a business man of himself and, what perhaps is of even greater pleasure to himself, has had many of his poems accepted by our leading periodicals.

When Sam was first married he went to live in an apartment close to those occupied by Dick and Tom, but two years later the three brothers had a chance to buy a beautiful plot of ground on Riverside Drive, facing the noble Hudson River, and on this they built three beautiful houses adjoining one another.

"I guess we are in New York to stay," was the way the oldest brother had expressed himself, "and if that is so we may as well make ourselves as comfortable here as possible."

Before the young folks moved into the new homes Dick and Dora were blessed with a little son, who later on was named John after Mr. John Laning. Little Jack, as he was always called by the others, was a wonderfully bright and clever lad and a great source of comfort to his parents.

Later still the young couple had a daughter, whom they named Martha after Dick's aunt.

Tom and Nellie had twin boys that were speedily christened Andy after Mr. Anderson Rover, and Randy after Tom's Uncle Randolph. Then Sam came along with a daughter, who was called Mary after Mrs. Laning and with a son, whom he called Fred after his old school chum, Fred Garrison.

The young Rover boys had a great many qualities similar to those displayed by their fathers. Little Jack was as strong and sturdy as Dick had ever been, and young Fred had many of the peculiarities of Sam, while Andy and Randy, the twins, were the equal of their father, Tom, for creating fun.

"I don't know what we're ever going to do with those kids," remarked Tom, one day, after Andy and Randy had played a big joke on Jack and Fred. "Some day they'll pull the house down over our ears."

"Well, Andy and Randy are simply chips of the old block," laughed Dick Rover. "I suppose we'll all have to do as our folks did with us—send the lads off to some strict boarding school."

"If I ever do send them off, I know where it will be," answered Tom Rover. "Our old Putnam Hall chum, Larry Colby, has opened a first-

class military academy which he calls Colby Hall. If I ever send them away I think I'll send them to Larry."

"That wouldn't be a half bad idea," put in Sam Rover. "Larry was always a first-class fellow and I don't doubt but what he is running a first-class school."

"Well, those boys are too young yet to leave home," was Dick Rover's comment. "If they are to go to boarding school that must come later."

A few years after that Jack, Andy and Randy, and Fred were sent to Colby Hall, and it is possible that some day I may tell you of what happened there to this younger generation of Rovers.

Dick, Tom, and Sam were happy, and with good reason. They had the best of wives, and children that they dearly loved, and though they worked hard they were surrounded with every comfort. Every summer, and at Christmas time, they left New York either for Valley Brook or for Cedarville, there to receive the warmest of welcomes. Life looked rosy to all of them, and here we will leave them and say good-bye.

THE END

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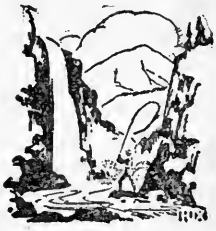

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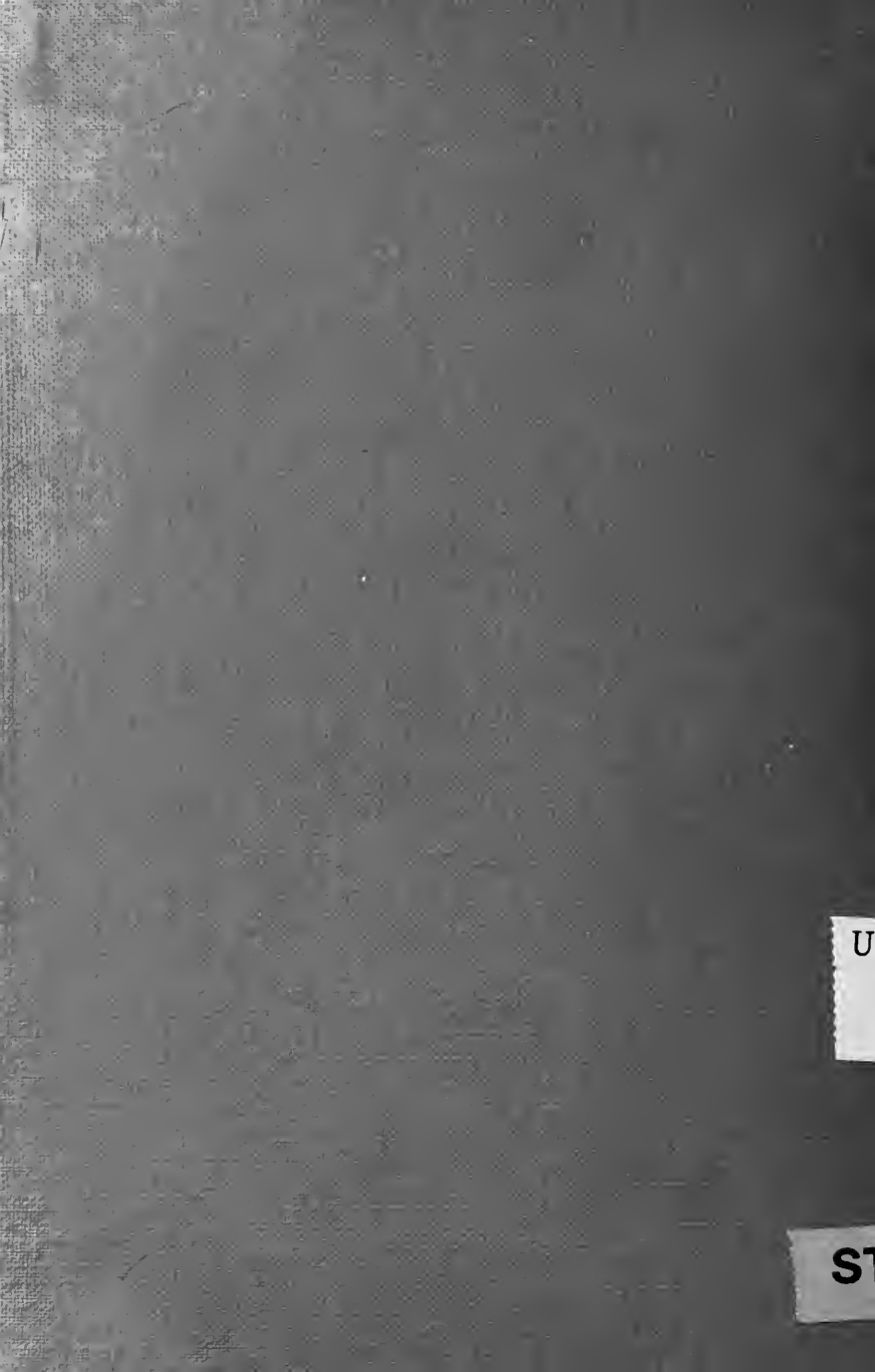
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